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A Teacher of Dante
and other studies in Italian Literature

A TEACHER OF DANTE

AND

OTHER STUDIES IN ITALIAN LITERATURE

BY

NATHAN HASKELL DOLE

AUTHOR OF "THE PILGRIMS," "FAMOUS COMPOSERS," ETC.

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

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Brunetto Latini, ere he flies across the sandy plain like "those who at Verona run after the green *pallio*," fleeting "like one who wins and not like one who loses," recommends to Dante his "Tesoro."

Now who was Brunetto Latini and what was his "Tesoro"?

The year of Brunetto's birth is not certain. A portrait engraved from an oil painting in Florence gives the date of his birth as 1230; other authorities refer it back ten or even fifteen years. His father was Bonacorsi Latini, who must have died before 1254.

Villari, the Florentine chronicler, says that he was *cominciatore e maestro in digrossare i Fiorentini e farli scorti in bene parlare ed in sapere guidare e reggere la nostra repubblica secondo la politica;* in other words, that he was supreme master in rhetoric and eloquence and taught the Florentines the precepts of good government. Boccaccio calls him a *valente uomo*, a man of ability, in "several of the liberal arts and in philosophy, though his chief profession was that of a notary" —*Burnectus notarius filius quondam Bonnacorsi Latini.* Such is his affidavit on a deed of sale.

Boccaccio goes on to say that having made a mistake in a contract drawn up by him he was charged with *falsita* and, preferring to be called a forger to confessing his error, he left Florence in indignation and left behind him a book which he had composed called "Il Tesoretto."

Boccaccio in this charge against Brunetto has been followed by other commentators, but the probability is that it was invented by one of his political opponents, he being a Guelf. Boccaccio also states that he went to Paris, was there for a long time and was thought to have died there. Here again Boccaccio erred, for Ricordano Malispini chronicles the fact that when Alfonso of Spain became Emperor the Guelfs of Florence sent ambassadors urging him to take their side in the great quarrel that was agitating their city: "And the ambassador was Ser Brunetto Latini, a man of great judgment; but before the mission was accomplished the Florentines were defeated at Monte Aperti, and King Manfred waxed greatly in power, winning almost all 'Talia, and the might of the Church was greatly diminished."

The defeat of the Guelfs took place on the

4th of September, 1260. Brunetto Latini himself chronicles the fact in the last chapter of the second part of Book I. of his "Livres dou Tresor":

"This Frederick [II.] reigned about thirty years, until by reason of the grievous persecutions which he inflicted upon the Holy Church he was excommunicated by sentence of the Apostolic fathers and finally was deposed from his dignity by sentence of Pope Innocent IV., with the unanimous consent of the General Council. And after his death, as God willed, the empire was long without either king or emperor until Manfred [Mainfroiz], the son of the aforementioned Frederick, though not born in legal marriage, seized the kingdom of Naples and Sicily [*le roiaume de Puille et de Secile*] contrary to God and contrary to right, since it was all against Holy Church. And therefore he made many wars and divers persecutions against all the Italians who held to Holy Church, especially against the Guelf party of Florence, so that they were driven out of the city and their property was subjected to fire and destruction; and with them was driven out also *maistre Brunez Latin;* and by reason of this war he

went as an exile into France, where he wrote this book for love of his friends."

In another passage, not found in all manuscripts, he relates how he went to France to make his living there and found a fellow citizen, also a Guelf, very rich, very polite and very sensible, who did him great honour and proved very useful to him; and as this friend was naturally a good speaker and was very anxious to know what had been said by the ancients regarding rhetoric, Brunetto Latini, who was a careful student of literature and much given to the study of rhetoric, wrote the book and dedicated it to his friend.

Brunetto's stay in Paris could not have been very long, for Manfred was defeated by King Charles on the last day of February, 1265, the Ghibellines left Florence in their turn in the following November, and the Guelfs were definitely reëstablished two years later, and in 1269 Brunetto Latini was *protonotario della curia* for King Charles of Sicily. In 1273 he was notary and secretary of councils of the Commune of Florence. In 1280 he was one of the signatories in the famous peace between the Guelfs and Ghibellines conducted by Cardinal

Latino. He had other honourable functions, which would seem to do away with Boccaccio's indictment of him as a "forger."

He died in Florence in 1294 and was buried in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, where the inscription reads: *Sepulcrum Ser Brunetti Latini et filiorum.* Villani says:

"In the said year 1294 there died in Florence a worthy citizen named Ser Brunetto Latini, who was a great philosopher and was a supreme master [*sommo maestro*] in rhetoric, both in theory and practice [*tanto in bene sapere dire come in bene dittare*], and he it was who expounded the rhetoric of Cicero and wrote the good and useful book called 'Tesoro' and 'Il Tesoretto' and many other works on philosophy and dealing with vices and virtues, and was secretary or speaker of our commune [*dittatore del nostro comune*]."

Dante places Brunetto Latini in that part of hell where the sins against nature are punished. Villari says *fu mondano uomo*, which may or may not be interpreted in a derogatory sense. Brunetto himself in the twenty-first capitolo of his "Tesoretto" gives some colour to an evil suggestion in the word. After relating his conversion he says:

Che sai che siam tenuti
Un poco mondanetti.

But on the same principle of interpretation one might charge him with being guilty of all the sins that he animadverts upon in the same chapter, and this would surely be absurd. It is easier to explain the matter by remembering that although Dante and Brunetto were both Guelfs they seemed to have belonged to rival factions. Moreover, Brunetto himself utters his indignation against those who are guilty of the horrible vice which the flakes of flame forever falling brand but never purify.

A portrait of Brunetto Latini is to be seen in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. A different one is preserved in the Chapel of the Podesta's palace, while in the cupola of Dante's tomb at Ravenna the four medallions decorating the vault respectively represent Vergil, Can Grande, Guido Cavalcanti and Brunetto Latini.

Brunetto Latini, as we have seen, recommends his "Tesoro" or Thesaurus to Dante and posterity. It is an open question whether he means "Li Livres dou Tresor," a monumental compilation written in French, but often called "Il Gran Tesoro," or his poetical crystallisation of the

same written in short rhyming Italian couplets. Why did he write "Li Tresors" in French? He himself tells why:

"And if any ask why this work is written in romance, according to the language of the French, while we are Italian, I will state that it is for two reasons: first, we are in France, and secondly because French is the more agreeable and widely known than many other languages" — or, according to other texts, "is more delightful, more ornate and more commonly known than other languages."*

The work is divided into three books. The first, consisting of five parts, in 202 chapters, treats of the origin of the world, and contains a summary of sacred and profane history and dissertations on astronomy, geography and natural history. Some of the animals which he describes in the fifth part would add much to the attractiveness of a circus. Brunetto Latini took not a little of his information from Pliny and the fascinating bestiaries which were

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* *Et se aucuns demandoit por quoi cist livres est escriz en romans, selonc le langage des Francois, puisque nos somes Ytaliens, je diroie que ce est? por ij. raisons: l'une, car nos somes en France; et l'autre porce que francois est plus delitaubles lengages et plus communs que moult d'autres.*

so popular all through the Middle Ages. He gives precious details regarding the habits of sirens, the wonderful powers of salamanders, halcyons, the phœnix and the unicorn.

The second part treats of virtues and vices and is a sort of abridgement of Aristotle's Ethics, complemented with the teachings of *mains autres sages:* the apostles, Seneca, St. Bernard, Cicero, Ovid and others. The third part is devoted to an exposition of rhetoric: *les enseignemens de bone parleure,* and to a brief treatise on the *governmenz des villes and des cites.* A Latin note, possibly emanating from the copyist and appended to the very end, states that the work was finished *die xix. Augusti anno Domini* MCCLXXXIII." 1283

Interesting as is "Li Livres dou Tresor" from an historical, literary and linguistic standpoint, there is nothing in it that throws any light upon the training of Dante. He may very likely have known "Li Tresors," for the compilation immediately became extremely popular, as is proved by the multitudes of manuscripts, in nearly every dialect of mediæval French, that have come down to us, and by the Italian paraphrases that were made of it.

The "Tesoretto," on the other hand, has a definite value in the study of the "Commedia." A very superficial examination will show that Dante did not hesitate to imitate Brunetto Latini in many curious little details.

A short analysis of this poem may, therefore, be interesting to Dante students who are unfamiliar with the original.

It begins with a dedication to the worthy Signore whose superior cannot be found on earth, who has no equal either in peace or in war; faultless, and of lofty lineage; a second Solomon in wisdom, in all benignity the like of Alexander, who holds as nothing lands, gold and silver; by lofty understanding of all poetry wears the crown and mantle of courage and fine valour, thus equal to the gallant Achilles in fame acquired, to the good Hector of Troy, to Lancelot and Tristan; in eloquence, either in council or in debate, the equal of the good Roman Tullius; the superior in reasoning of Seneca and Cato; in fine, the very paragon of all good qualities. To him he says:

> I, Brunetto Latino,
> Myself recommend to you
> And now present and send to you
> This Treasure which I hold
> Worth more than wealth of gold.

He begs him to hold it dear and keep it as a miser keeps his treasures, for he declares that he has seen many precious things and jewels held in low esteem by people.

"I know well," he says, "that good is much less valuable to him who keeps it hidden in himself than that which is spread abroad, just as the candle shines less on him who hides it. But I have already written things of great tenderness, both in prose and in rhyme, and then most secretly given them to some dear friend, only, and I grieve to confess it, to see them afterward in the hands of children, and so multiplied that all secrecy had vanished."

"If such a thing should happen to this," he says, "let it be cursed and thrown into hell."

This long rhymed dedication leaves open the question for whom it was intended. M. Chabaille, the editor of the Imperial edition of "Li Tresors," does not hesitate to state that *Il valente Signore* was the Florentine poet Rustico di Filippo, whom Brunetto mentions by name in the second chapter of his "Faveletto," which is sometimes considered as a part of the "Tesoretto"; but the royal comparisons which

he makes of his patron and the rather fulsome flattery which he heaps on him lend some plausibility to the Abbé Zannoni's conjecture that it was written in Paris and dedicated to Louis IX., who mounted the throne in November, 1226, and died in July, 1270, who he says "was of high lineage, gallant in war, great in peace, so humble-minded and benignant that he accounted state and wealth as nothing, of vast knowledge and eloquent, strong in misfortunes and eminent in every virtue."

If the "Tresors" was written in Paris, "Il Tesoretto" must also have been composed shortly before or at least while he had the "Gran Tesoro" already planned in his mind; because at the end of the fourteenth capitolo he says: "In this little book I will speak openly [*senza veste*] of Courtesy and Generosity and Loyalty and Valour, of all these I will speak, but of the others I will not promise to speak or to relate; but whoever may wish to find them may search in the "Gran Tesoro" which I will write for those who have their hearts set higher, and there I will make a great endeavour to treat them more at length in the French tongue:

Cerchi nel gran Tesoro
Ch' io farò per coloro
Ch' hanno lo cor più alto.
Là farò il gran salto
Per dirle più distese
Nella lingua franzese."

It is evident, then, that Brunetto felt a greater tenderness for his poetical thesaurus than for his French one; that Dante took from the dedication the recommendation to his patron to treat it as a treasure.

The second chapter relates how the "Tesoretto," which he still calls "Tesoro," "begins at the time when Florence was flourishing and was fruitful, so that it was in all respects the mistress of Tuscany." This wise commune, he goes on to say, sent him on an embassy to the mighty King Nanfosse, that is to say, Alfonso.

So in 1260 he took companions and went to Spain and accomplished the mission which had been entrusted to him, and then without delay started to return; but on the road through the plain of Roncesvalles he fell in with a student on a bay mule coming from Bologna, and when he demanded news of Tuscany in gentle and plain speech, the traveller told him courteously that the Guelfs of Florence had by evil

providence and force of war been banished and many had suffered imprisonment and death. And he says he turned to Nature; for though every man who comes into the world is born first to his parents, then for his relatives, and then for his Commune, still Nature is, in last analysis, the mother of all.*

And as he goes his heart almost bursts with grief to think of the great honour, the wealth and the power — *ricca potenza* — which Florence once enjoyed, and as he walks along he loses the highway and finds himself in the midst of a strange forest. Brunetto Latini's *selva diversa* is, of course, the *selva oscura* in which Dante finds himself "in the midst of the road of this our life."

Brunetto, suddenly coming to himself, looks toward a mountain and beholds a vast throng of strange animals — such, perhaps, as he afterward described in the bestiary division of his "Tresors" — "men and women, beasts, ser-

*Ed io ponendo cura
Tornai alla natura
Ch'audivi dir che tene
Ogn'uom ch' al mondo vene
E nasce primamente
Al padre, e al parente
E poi al suo Communo.

pents and wild creatures and fish in great schools and every kind of flying birds and herbs and fruits and flowers and stones and pearls such as are greatly prized and so great a multitude of other things that no speaking man could name them or classify them."

But he could see "that they obeyed a figure and in accordance with her commands finished and began, died and generated, and took their characteristics."

This figure, which is the personification or incarnation of Nature, touches the very sky, which appears her veil, and sometimes causes it to change and sometimes to grow stormy. At her command the Firmament moves and unfolds, so that the whole world seems to be enclosed in her arms. Now her face smiles and then again it displays anger and pain. And Brunetto says:

"And I, beholding the lofty circumstance and her mighty power and her arbitrary will [some editions, however, read *clemenza* instead of *licenza*], awakened from my melancholy thoughts and resolved on sufficient hardihood to come into her presence with all reverence, so that I might see all her power and learn surely of her state."

As he regards her closer he beholds that the hair of her head is of fine gold, parted without tresses, and all the other charms which are united under her white brow — the beautiful eyes and eyebrows and the rosy lips and the clear-cut nose and the pearly teeth. That last detail is literally *dente argentato* — silvery — for the sake of the rhyme; for it must be confessed that the exigencies of these settenarie couplets sometimes lead Ser Brunetto into forced rhymes, into quaint obscurities, and the really fine imagery of personified Nature which distinguishes the third chapter is not kept up to the end.

As he regards her he knows that not in speech or in writing could he or any man do justice to her beauty or her might in air, or in earth, or in the sea, in creation and in destruction, however life begins or however it ends.

But as soon as this majestic personage beholds him she smiles on him and says: *Io sono la Natura.*

I am Nature
And I am the creature
Of the Sovereign Creator.
By Him was I created,
By Him was I begun;

But His almighty power
Had no beginning hour.
It has no end or limit,
But all that I create,
Whate'er illuminate,
Must meet its final fate.
He is omnipotent —
But nothing can I do
Unless He wills me to.
He foresees everything,
His eye is everywhere,
He knows all that is past
And what the future 'll bring
And what is doing now.
Save what He may allow,
I am quite impotent.
I make whate'er he wills,
Through me all life fulfils;
I am His working hand
And act at His command.
And thus in earth and air
I am his own vicaire.

She goes on to speak at length, and very didactically, of the "four modes" set in operation at the beginning of time, the seven days of Creation, of the birth of Christ, His Mother pure and wholly chaste, a Virgin uncorrupted, His death that men might live. Then, descending to particulars, she relates the details of creation day by day — on the first, the jocund light — *la*

luce gioconda — the sky, the earth, the sea, the air, and the angels, each separately and from nothing; on the second, the Firmament; on the fourth all the luminaries, the diverse and varied stars; on the fifth every creature that swims in *aqua pura*, and so on till the sixth day, when Adam and Eve were created, only to be driven from Paradise and to become mortal and to entail all manner of woes on their descendants, because the ancient serpent, our enemy, seduced in such a shameful way that first woman.

Then it seems to him that all creatures and things approach Nature to ask her permission to fulfil their mission, and so great is his anxiety to know the truth of all that she had said that each hour seemed to him longer than a day, and instead of going on his way he kneels down and begs Nature to complete her great story — *tutta la grande storia.*

Accordingly she explains to him the subtle genius and power of the human mind. How first and foremost God created at the head of all created things the angelic substance which is of His own nature and gave them all good things and precious, all virtues and eternal

salvation and beauty of limbs and complexion and immortality; how then into Lucifer's mind entered pride and he felt himself equal to God; but in the struggle he was thrust out of the kingdom with all those who held with him and fell as if rained into hell, into sempiternal fire. How afterward, in the guise of a serpent, he deceived Eve and then Adam, thus bringing on man pain and discord and sorrow and travail. From that moment began the division of time:

Il giorno e l'mese e l'anno
Venne da quell' inganno —

and sorrow of bearing and labour in the earth and war and homicide and sin.

She cannot go into the divine subtlety of creation of the fruitful earth without any sowing of seed or affair of living man, but she calls his attention to the fact that nature is full of variety — no two animals are alike nor is there any concordance either in form or in face. But this she declares is certain — that man stands above all created things and that God omnipotent desires that all his trials should end for the best; according to the proverb that the end will crown the work; man, therefore, is the noblest and

worthiest and most precious of all things and has sovereignty over all the earth. Other animals face the ground, signifying the great baseness of their condition, being without reason, but man has noble speech, reason and science, and the mind of man is so worthy and dear and noble and excellent that it is lodged in the head and is the light and crown of the whole person; is able to discern good and evil.

"In the head," she says, "are three cells. The one in front is the seat or receptacle of all the intellect and the power of learning whatever you can understand. In the middle one are reason and discretion, the power of discernment of good and evil and of the crooked and the straight. The one behind contains the glory of good memory, which retains whatever comes into it, the source of the five senses whose functions are to bring to the cells good and evil, facts and fancies."

She goes on to tell of the four humours of different colours which make the different complexions or temperaments of man — the melancholy, the sanguine, the phlegmatic and the choleric; of the four elements — air, water, fire, earth, and how cold is opposed to heat, dry to

wet. Then of the seven planets, each in its *parete* or circle, and of the twelve signs of the zodiac with their specific duty of giving the different qualities of weather. There is a hint of the astrological importance of these heavenly phenomena, but Brunetto was evidently more interested in what he calls *storlomia*, or astronomy, than in the more subtle division of mediæval science.

When she has finished her long genesis, which is very curious in comparison with Milton's cosmogony, both perhaps being in no small measure derived from Boethius, Nature causes him actually to behold the principal rivers, four in number, flowing out of Paradise; Euphrates, rolling down toward *Hipotania* precious stones and gems of vast value and purest water; Gion, bathing the whole land of Egypt, restoring the injury that Egypt gets in never having rain; the Tigris, never seen by living man, the Phison, so distant and strange that none ever navigates it, dividing from us the Levant, where are jewels of priceless value: balsam and amber and purple, aloes and cardamon, ginger and cinnamon and many other spices, the best and purest and most medicinal; and tigers and griffons,

elephants (*leofanti*) and lions, camels and dragumenes, basilisks, hyenas and panthers and beavers and ants of gold and many other animals, the names of which happen to fall conveniently into rhyme.

The golden ants — *formiche dell' oro* — of which he makes mention are more fully described in "Li Tresors." They are Ethiopian insects as big as dogs, and they dig up the gold with their feet, and then guard it so faithfully that none can get at it and live! The Ethiopians, however, had a method of outwitting these gold-loving creatures, and thus they grew richer than other nations. Brunetto Latini thus anticipated Edgar Allan Poe's "Gold-Bug," as well as Dante. Then the potent Queen extends her hand toward the ocean-sea which girdles and encloses the land, and has a nature hard to comprehend, growing greatly for some hours and then sinking again; and near this ocean-sea are the great columns which Hercules the powerful set up as signs to all nations that here the land ended; and hence extends the navigation from Spain to Pisa and Greece and Tuscany and Egypt; but what he learned in this visit he will tell in prose, and

therefore you will find it in the geographical part of his "Gran Tesoro," written, as he repeatedly informs us, in French.

Then, since Nature perceives that it is time for him to depart, she begins with grace and love to speak her farewell, and gives him directions how to go safely through the forest until he shall see Filosofia and all her sisters and hear news from the four Virtues, and, if he likes, may find *Ventura* — that is to say, Fortune — and if he would put his trust in one who has no certain way he will see Baratteria — that is, Barter — who gives good and ill. If he is fearless he may see God and Love and many people in bliss and woe.

Then, having kissed her feet, he sees her no more. Brunetto Latini sets forth

> Through the narrow road
> Seeking to see,
> To touch and to know
> Whatever is fated.

And soon he finds himself in the desert, where is neither certain road nor path. His exclamation :

> *De che paese fero*
> *Trovai in quelle parti!* —

"Ah, what a wild country I found in those parts" — corresponds closely enough with Dante's

Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
Questa selva selvaggia ed aspra e forte!

Read the first lines of the first canto of the Inferno and then read these lines of Brunetto:

Quivi non ha viaggio
Quivi non ha persone,
Quivi non ha mangione,
Non bestia, non uccello,
Non fiume, non ruscello,
Non formica, ne mosca,
Ne cosa che' i' conosca:—

All savage, no way, no person, no dwelling, no beast, no bird, no river, no brook, no ant, no fly, nothing that he had ever seen! And as he looks about he gives himself up for dead, for this wilderness — *quel paese snagiato* — stretches three hundred miles in every direction, but he plucks up courage, and at the end of the third day he finds himself in a great jocund plain, the gayest in the world and the most delightful, and he will not relate all he finds and sees, nor can he believe his eyes, for he sees emperors and kings and grand signors and masters of science and, above all, says he:

I saw an empress
Whose name the people said
Was Virtue and the head
And salvation
Of all politeness
And of good manners
And of the good rules
Whereby the people live.
And with my eyes I saw
Four queenly daughters born of her.

These four daughters are Prudence, Temperance, Bravery and Justice, and by a miracle they seem now together one and then separate and divided. And each in this quality of division having her own lineage and course and affairs, has her court and state.

He goes first to the court of Prudence, where she is served by four royal women: Providence, Respect, Knowledge and Instruction; then to the palace of Temperance with her retinue of five grand princesses: Exactness, Honesty, Chastity, Understanding and Restraint, corresponding to the five senses and holding together rich converse of great edification; thence to the great fortress where Bravery (*Fortezza* or *Prodezza*) dwells surrounded by six countesses: Magnificence, Faithfulness, Security, Magnanimity, Patience and Firmness. Thence a little farther

on and he sees "the crowned lady in a hall holding high festival and over the entrance in gilded letters: "I am called Justice everywhere," and elsewhere he sees four *maestre grandi*, to whose commands almost all the nations are obedient.

These eighteen, or as Brunetto says, for the sake of the meter, these twenty *donne reali*, royal ladies, the offspring of Virtue, have such grandeur and nobleness that no tongue or pen could do justice to them; but those who are most worshipful and useful to men are four:

Cortesia e Larghezza
E Leanza e Prodezza—

Courtesy and Generosity and Loyalty and Prowess. Three of these he finds in the *casa di Giustizia*. First, Generosity gives him at considerable length her instructions in regard to all wise living and shows him how no man by generosity ever comes to poverty, how he is broad and sage who spends his money to save his penny. She expands the Latin proverb *bis dat qui cito dat* into the jingling couplet—

Che donar tostamente
E donar doppiamente.

But she guards against foolish giving and all

vain glory or spending in taverns and throwing away money in drink. "I have seen," she says, "persons buying capons, partridges or a great fish where there was no gain from the expenditure!"

In the companionship of a *cavalier valente* to whom Larghezza directed him he next goes in search of Cortesia and she likewise gives him good advice: to refrain from tattling, not to use injurious language, not to lie or say any villainy of others, not to speak even under provocation a vulgar word; then from negative she comes to positive commands and shows him how he may walk through the city with those of lower or of higher rank: "If your companion is of lower rank," she says, "you may walk a step in advance, and if you ride on horseback see that you go very courteously, ride gracefully *cavalca bellamente* with the head a little bent, since to ride with loose rein seems great barbarism, and do not hold the head so high as to look at all the house-tops!"

Then still in company with his *cavalier giocoso e molto confortoso*, who shows in his face the delight he had felt in hearing Courtesy's words, Brunetto Latini passes on to Leanza, Loyalty, who begins her discourse by a warning

against lying, for the lie returns in shame and has brief run. She preaches devotion to the Commune and love and faith in the Holy Church and honour to Christ and the saints.

Prodezza, Bravery, or Prowess, has similar good advice to offer and she cautions against fear of death: "No screen hast thou to hide a man from death when death comes" is the teaching. "Then be fearless, injure no living man, even if thou art stronger, all the more be on thy guard; use gentle speech and go with sense, but if sense avail not, then put force against force"; and this brings her to speak of private and public quarrels and the proper behaviour of a gentleman:

"If perchance the commune send out an army of cavalry I will that thou go in their ranks bearing thyself with baron's state and showing thyself greater than thou really art; and display thy valour and make fine show of intrepidity and be not slow or late, for no coward ever wins honour or becomes great."

Having thus heard all that the four great mistresses of morals have to say, Brunetto with his mysterious companion, the cavalier, who in Dante of course is Vergil, takes the road to the

right, and, passing by vales and mountains, groves, forests and seas, they reach a beautiful meadow such as is in Dante described as the home of the philosophic family. It is full of flowers, the richest in the world. It is a mysterious place, for he says: "Now it seemed round, now square, now dark, now bright and shining. Now I see many people, now I see no one; now I see a pavilion, now I see houses and towers. One lies prone, another races; one flies, another chases; one stands, another strives; one enjoys, another goes mad; one weeping, the other consoling."

Here he finds a confessional and is absolved from all sin and given courage to proceed, and a little farther he finds four children whom in courtesy he begs to show him the way and tell him of the place and the people, and the wisest of them tells him briefly:

> Thou must know, Mastro Brunetto,
> That here is monsignore,
> The Head and God of Love.
> If thou believest me,
> Pass on and thou shalt see
> Whereof I dare not speak.

They vanish in an instant, he knows not how nor whither, nor does he know their signs or

their names. But going farther he sees many people, some joyous and some sad, and before the *signore* appears another throng making a great noise, and then he sees a fresh young child standing erect and naked, with bow and arrows, and he has wings and feathers, but he is blind and he often shoots off his arrows at haphazard.

This infant's name is Piacere, or sensual love, and near him are four *donne valenti*, who hold the mastery over men, and he sees the measure and reason of their mastery, and their names he hears:

Paura e Disianza
E Amore e Speranza:—

Fear and Longing and Love and Hope, each exercising her arts and power and knowledge to her utmost, thus Desire swaying the mind and compelling it to get possession of the object desired without thought of honour or reputation or death.

These four passions so affect a man that when he falls in love he yearns and fears and hopes and loves and the keen arrows from Pleasure's bow pierce him and make him desire corporeal delight, so much is love a matter of

the heart. And these four though acting in different fields, and even in opposition (Fear against Hope), yet work in common for one end.

Brunetto confesses that he himself in spite of his efforts to shield himself from the infant's darts yet fell into the power of Love. But suddenly turning round he sees in a rich mantle Ovid, the great master who had told of the acts of Love and put them into verse, and at his request Ovid tells him frankly:

E lo bene e lo male
Del Fante delle ale —

both the good and the evil qualities of the winged infant. Ovid replies to his questions, not in Latin, but in *volgare*, that is in Italian, showing that this popular language was already beginning to appeal even to learned men: he says that no one who had failed to experience the power of Love knows anything about it and bids him search into his own heart for the good and the delight and the evil and error which is born of Love:

Cercati fra lo petto
Del bene e del diletto,
Del male e dell' errore
Che nasce per amore.

And when he would fain have fled he finds himself, as it were, rooted to the spot, but Ovid, by his art, gives him the mastery, so that he finds his way again. But such had been his fear and weariness and pain that he is resolved to turn to God and his saints, and humbly confess his sins to the priests and friars and to submit to them his *libretto*, begging them to correct it and collate this as well as all his writings with the teachings of the Christian faith.

Here really ends the "Tesoretto," and the twentieth chapter begins the "Penitenza," which, in two quite long cantos, leads in turn to the "Favoletto," dedicated to his friend Rustico di Felippo.

Finding that Fortune turns her wheel in the wrong direction, that all earthly things are sinful and painful and that man is vanity, that even Julius Cæsar, the first Emperor, and Samson, the strongest man, were soon laid low in their graves, and Alexander, the conqueror of the world, Absalom the beautiful, Hector the generous, Solomon the wise, Octavian the rich — not one lived a day beyond their appointed time, while flowers, leaves and fruits, birds, beasts and fishes are alike subject to

death: therefore he reasons that Solomon is right in saying that all things are *vanitate vana.*

"Friend," he says, "engage in war, and travel through all the earth, and go ploughing the sea before the wind; wear costly things and eat rich food; gain silver and gold; amass great treasure! What does it all amount to? — wrath, fatigue and shame!"

Seeing, therefore, that he is a guilty man, a sinner, and on the road to perdition, he determines to desist in time. So he enters the confessional at Monposlieri, by which he means Montpensier, and tells the friars all his sins: "*Ah lasso!* how corrupt I was! What evil deeds worse than crimes I had committed! What sins worse than death!"

And he especially confesses to the charge of having been rather dissolute or worldly:

Che sai che siam tenuti
Un poco mondanetti.

He had wrecked himself on the rocks of pride. Had he loved his Creator with all his heart, or been obedient to His commands; had he boasted of what he had done of good or folly; had he been hypocritical; had he been proud and haughty by reason of riches and good breeding,

grand relatives, praise for his actions? Through pride, the head and root of evil and sin, had he claimed to have what he had not? He anticipates Shakespeare in his *per orgogliamento — fallio l'angel matto* — "Through pride fell the mad angel, and Eve broke the compact, and the death of Abel and the tower of Babel, and the Trojan war."

These sins are perhaps by implication, for he puts them apparently into the friar's mouth, and follows them up with a long homily against envy and irreverence and presumption and other mortal sins. After inveighing, for instance, against the sin of passing a false florin, which probably Brunetto Latini was never even tempted to do, the friar proceeds:

"The man who is too avaricious [*scarso*] — I believe has his heart burnt within him, and he who has no pity on the poor or those in prison falls wholly into hell. Through avarice only arises gluttony, whereby come weariness and sickness and inebriation, the source of scorn. And from *ghiottornia* the road leads straight to sensuality — *lussuria* — and how shameful this sin is in an old man —a double sin [*doppio peccato*]!"

Thence he goes on to speak of those special forms of *lussuria* which Dante punishes in the fourteenth and fifteenth cantos of the Inferno. Dante takes him at his word and adjudges him guilty of the terrible indictment:

Ma tra questi peccati
Son vie più condannati
Que' che son soddomiti.
Deh come son periti
Que' che contra natura
Brigen cotal lussura.

"Now," says the friar, "behold, my dear friend, and heed what I say. See how many sins I have told you of, and all are mortal, and thou knowest that thou art guilty of such — very few of which are cured. See, it is no joking matter [*non è gioco*] to fall into sin, and I advise thee in all friendliness to beware lest the world entice thee!"

Brunetto having received absolution — and this surely ought to have given him a chance at the purification of Purgatory — he returns to the forest on a festal day, and on the morning after he finds himself on the *monte d' Olempo*, on its very summit, from which he sees the whole world and how it is round, and all the land and the sea and the air and the fire above

the air; that is to say, the four elements which are the sustenance of all creatures according to their natures; and turning he beholds a white mantle near a great broom tree, and when he looks more closely he beholds a being with a white visage with a long beard spreading over the breast, and when he approaches it proves to be Ptolemy, the

Mastro di storlomia
E di filosofia.

Ptolemy, who corresponds to Statius in Dante, receives him politely and gives him a full explanation of the cause and reason and nature of the four elements and of their foundations. It is supposed that these teachings of Ptolemy were to have been given in Italian prose, but the prose is missing and the poem ends abruptly.

The two chapters of the "Favoletto" have no connection whatever with the "Tesoretto," though written in the same doggerel rhyme and meter. We may therefore dismiss it with a word. Nor do the other writings of Brunetto especially interest us, not even his "Fiore di Filosofi e di Molti Savi," which consists of short articles, all beginning with pretty much the same phrase:

Pittagora fue uno filosofo, Socrate fue grandissimo filosofo, and the like.

Brunetto Latini's ingenuity in keeping up his jerky doggerel for three thousand lines or more is something wonderful. Of course, it often leads him into discursiveness, but oftentimes it gives a certain epigrammatic spiciness. It soon grows monotonous, and the occasional poetic imagery does not show for what it is worth. As a study of language, the "Tresors" and the "Tesoretto" are each interesting in their own way, but, aside from the linguistic value which the Italian has, often showing, as it does, the less sophisticated meaning of words that afterward became subtle, the student is probably right in giving more attention to "Li Tresors."

But it seems palpable that the man himself appears in the poem and we can construct with some satisfaction an outline of his character. He was scholarly, but he was genial. He was loyal to Florence and a patriot, but he was free from that acid bitterness that seared Dante's very soul. He was more ingenious than poetical. No real poet could possibly have stuck so determinedly to a scheme of rhyme that was destined from its very nature to be largely

doggerel. Even the epigrammatic couplets have nothing of the popular proverb about them. There are few that cling to the memory and serve as apt quotations. It is not exaggeration to say that Dante quite obscured his feeble light as the sun obscures the light of Mercury. But by reason of Dante's indebtedness to him, as well as from a certain quaint originality in the man himself, he is worth studying.

At the end we cannot help wondering how Dante had the heart to condemn to those regions of pitiless fire the man who, whether he was his teacher or not, left a statement of philosophy and morals that in view of its wide dissemination throughout the Middle Ages must have had a vast influence for good.

II

DANTE AND THE PICTURESQUE

DANTE, under the similitude of a mountain, may be approached from a dozen different sides. He stands, as it were, on the summit of an age, the one predominant among a score of prominent figures. He serves to divide the dark from the light. Behind him are the centuries of intellectual night; before him lie the æons of dawn. He was of course conditioned by the thought, the atmosphere, the environment in which he was placed; but he was also the prophet of the new, of the advanced, of the future. With what passionate eloquence he held up before men's eyes the lofty ideal of patriotism, of freedom under law, of religion, of stainless character.

It is a wonderful thing about this great man that men in all times have found in him something that appealed to their inmost needs. In countless thousands his writings have awakened a new sense of mental power, have stimulated new trains of thought and have opened up new fields of action. Students of one class have

discovered in him a key to history; those of another have learned by their study of his perfect art to appreciate all that is best in poesy; those of still another have thrilled with mystical exaltation at the allegorical and symbolical significance which they have read into his simplest lines. To others Nature has through his interpretation assumed a mightier meaning; to still others Religion has in his alembic distilled a subtler and more penetrating elixir of life.

Even those who approach Dante with the practical skepticism of these modern days fall under his spell. They may not be willing to confess or they may not be quite conscious of the secret of the charm, but it sways them.

Here and there a solitary voice of dissent is lifted, as where Matthew Browne is quoted with approbation as saying that Dante "was the embodiment of the jealousy, party-spirit and stunted inhuman scholasticism of the Middle Ages . . . his imagination was harsh and personal with no light relieving touch of phantasy any more than his genius was genial and attractive." But even while one may see the force of this statement, one is again and again

drawn back to the melodious text and the spell begins to work anew.

A recent writer, after giving various specimens of the horrors which Dante so vividly portrayed in the Inferno — souls swept by never-ceasing hellish winds, pelted by snow, hail and putrid water, lapped by devouring flames, grilling in vile boiling pitch, entombed in everlasting ice, declared that "if this be poetry, then Caligula and Alva may be classed among the 'mute inglorious Miltons' and poetic inspiration may be found in slaughtering an ox, performing a surgical operation or executing a criminal in the most barbarous manner ever known to the penal code of England."

Another critic makes this sweeping remark: "Subtract from the 'Inferno' its revolting pictures, some of which the art of Doré has so vividly realised to our actual vision, and it will be seen that little or nothing of interest remains — little at all events that would be recognised under the name of poetry, however it might have passed in former times for theology or philosophy."

Dante's cruelty was the inheritance of the ages: the Old Testament in its most rapturous

flights of poetic eloquence depicted the Almighty as rejoicing in the torment or destruction of His enemies, as holding them in derision. The cruel animal out of which grew generous, gentle, civilised man, left as its inheritance the tendency to take delight in the agonies and torments of his fellows. It was not strange that even in religion this relic should crop out now in the passionate eloquence of the Church Fathers, now in the poems of a Dante or a New England Wigglesworth, now in the excesses of the Inquisition or the bigotries of the Puritans.

Dante had many predecessors who equalled or even excelled him in depicting the horrors of the Damned. Tertullian whose life ended just fourteen centuries before Shakespeare's (170–216 A. D.) wrote thus in his book "De Speculis": "At that greatest of all spectacles, the Last Judgment and final, how shall I admire, how laugh, how rejoice, how exult when I behold so many proud monarchs groaning in the lowest abyss of darkness, so many magistrates liquefying in fiercer flames than they ever kindled against the Christians, so many wise philosophers blushing in red hot flames with their deluded pupils, so many tragic singers more tuneful in

the expression of their own suffering, so many dancers tripping more nimbly from anguish than ever before from applause."

Minucius Felix who lived about a hundred years later thus described the nature of penal fire:

"In hell, the intelligent fire burns the limbs and restores them, feeds on them and nourishes them."

Lactantius about 312 A. D. also described the divine fire:

"It always lives on itself and flourishes without any nourishment nor has it any smoke mixed with it but is pure and liquid and fluid like water — the same fire with one and the same energy will both burn the wicked and form them again and will replace as much as it will consume of their bodies and will supply itself with eternal nourishment."

Even he of the golden voice, St. Chrysostom, whose sixty years of life ended in 407 A. D., speaking of the inextinguishable fire, says: "How horrible it is, no words can tell." He compares it to a furiously boiling bath or a most consuming fever. "Truly," he goes on, "we shall grate our teeth under the agony of

the intolerable torment and none shall bring succour and we shall groan heavily while the flame presses us ever more fiercely."

It does not seem to mitigate the horror of it that the good saint included himself in the general condemnation. Peter Lombard, whose life covered the first sixty years of the twelfth century, was not so generous and was more bloodthirsty: "The elect will behold the torture of the impious and as they look they will not grieve. Their minds will be sated with joy as they gaze on the unspeakable anguish of the wicked and they will sing hallelujahs for their own immunity."

Just about a hundred years later Suso, a pupil of Eckhardt's, tried to give some slight notion of the length of the eternity "of the sobbing, sighing, weeping, howling, lamenting," by comparing it to a millstone as broad as the whole earth and so large as to touch the sky all around and pecked at by a little bird that should come once in a hundred thousand years, reducing it by a particle as large as the tenth part of a grain of millet, so that in a million years a particle as large as a grain of millet should be taken from it. If by the time the stone were reduced

to nothing there were hope for the Damned it would console them.

Saint Bonaventura, author of the "Biblia Pauperum," the *Doctor seraphicus* whose mysticism so enthralled Luther, had the same material notion of the infernal punishments by means of fire and ice and worms and stenches and all things horrible. But none of the Church Fathers exceed St. Bernard, the opponent of Abélard. He says:

"Oh Gehenna — a region to be shunned, where are burning fire, stiffening frost, horrible faces of demons. . . . Behold this most horrible chaos, the subterranean lake, the deepest of pits and all of fire. Likewise imagine a mighty city, horrible and dark within, burning with most obscure and terrible flames, with weeping and wailing and moaning everywhere from inexplicable woes and everything of the sort that can be conceived by the mind of man. Think of the bitterness of the punishment, for the heat of this fire is to ours as our fire is to a painted flame. And also think of the cold and the foul odours. The bitterness of this punishment is patent from the gnashing of teeth, from the groaning and the wailing and the blaspheming.

And so of other things. Consider the multitude of punishments; for there one will find inextinguishable most subtle fire, intolerable cold, horrible stench, palpable darkness. There will be punishment for all the senses: to the sight in horrible faces and aspects of demons; to the hearing, in lamentable groans and clamours arising from that wretched company and the cruelty of the torturers who, pitiless, never weary of torturing or are moved to pity. Consider also that in those members whereby they sinned will souls be tormented. Likewise the internal passions will reign in them: for especially will there be wraths and envyings and they will be like rabid dogs and they will yearn to die and find it impossible."

Thus Dante showed no originality in his conception of the torments of the damned. But his pictures have a gruesome picturesqueness which seems to bring them vividly before the mind especially when we recognise in these writhing tormented wretches the faces of statesmen and popes. Many poets before Dante had taken an imaginary pilgrimage through the regions of the dead. Not to speak of the two great pagan classic prototypes, it may be that

he was familiar with the "Visio Tungdali" which depicted an Irish Inferno where a viler Lucifer than Tartarus boasted tormented lost souls. Then there were the famous visions of St. Patrick and the vision of Frate Alberico and undoubtedly there were still others, for what is more natural than that men should use all the powers of their imaginations to realise to themselves what the Unseen may disclose?

Artists also have done their part both in suggestion and illustration, and we find the best commentary on Dante in the pictures that were painted about his own time to illumine the great Drama of Sin and Redemption — to Dante's friend Giotto di Bordone who painted the Apocalyptic Vision in the Church of Santa Chiara in Naples and the Last Judgment at Padua, or to Andrea Orcagna who transferred to the walls of chapels in Pisa and Florence scenes from the "Inferno." The quaint and crude designs that illustrate the famous edition of 1491 are in a certain sense more satisfactory than the more artistic conceptions of Michelangelo who has been called "the great art commentator of Dante" whose soul lives again in his immortal works. His Last Judgment may indeed have

been inspired by the "Divine Comedy" but Michelangelo and Rafael and Tintoretto, as well as Flaxman and Doré and dozens of other artists, great though they be, are too modern in spirit perfectly to bring out the mediæval spirit of Dante's work. We must go to the Prerafaelites if we would see with Dante's eyes. Possibly we should find anything but æsthetic, figurative, symbolical beauty in a painting of Beatrice painted by Cimabue or Taddeo Bartolo or Taddeo Gaddi. Ideals of female beauty change from age to age.

When it is realised that between three and four thousand books and innumerable articles in periodicals have been written about Dante, the comparison to a mountain approached from many different sides becomes plain prose. Keen indeed has been the interest which the world has felt for more than six hundred years in the life and works of that stern uncompromising patriot-poet. His biography has been written with great confidence and in wonderful detail, but, as in the case of Shakespeare, legend seems inextricably mixed with truth and the mere external facts are few.

Yet his personality stands out before us with

extraordinary distinctness. We know exactly what was his mystical conception of Beatrice, what he intended to be read into the four-fold allegory of the "Divine Comedy," how far he was a disciple of Plato or of Aristotle; to what an extent he was influenced by the Arabian glosses of Ibn Roshd known to him as Averroes. In many of the landscapes of the "Purgatory" we detect the reminiscences of his travels; here and there are easily recognised bits of autobiographical information. The whole poem so vividly reflects his character that probably no mediæval personage is more real to us than Dante. The learning of the ages, the acuteness of the brightest scholars of Europe and America have been lavished in discussing every phrase of his prose and verse. The tides of opinion go sweeping over disputed passages as the sea sweeps over sunken boulders. One learned commentator spends years in puzzling over the question why the Latin poet Statius is so many times mentioned in the "Purgatory" and at last comes laboriously to the sensible conclusion that it was simply because the poet chose to mention him so many times.

Dante and Vergil generally occupy the fore-

ground in all the scenes that are panoramically unfolded in the first half of the great poem. So true is this that in many of the fifteenth century wood cuts illustrating the journey they are introduced no less than three times labelled with the initials V. and D. like haloes over their heads. More than one modern artist also has used his highest powers in depicting the two poets in their memorable journey — Vergil, from some antique bust or from imagination, but Dante from contemporary portraiture either in words as in Boccaccio's description or in paintings more or less dubious.

Boccaccio, who knew Dante personally, thus describes him:

"This poet of ours was of medium stature, and when he reached the age of maturity, walked a little bent, and his gait was dignified and gentle. He was always clad in very respectable clothes, in a habit suitable to his time of life. His face was long and his nose aquiline and his eyes rather large [*grossi*] than small; his jaws large [*grandi*] and the upper lip projected over the lower; and his complexion was dark; his hair and beard thick, black and curling, and he always looked melancholy and thoughtful."

Dante, in his first Latin Eclogue written toward the end of his life, conveys the impression that his hair was light; some scholars understand the words *solitum flavescere* to mean that his hair was yellow.

Leonardi Bruni who was born in 1370 — consequently nearly half a century after Dante's death — and wrote a life of him in the vernacular, after speaking of his mediocre patrimony says:

"He was a very polished man, of decent stature and of pleasant appearance and full of gravity; slow and sparing in speech but very clever in his repartees. His own portrait is to be seen in the Chiesa di Santa Croce about the middle of the Church, on the left hand as you go toward the High Altar, admirably painted from life by a perfect painter of his day."

It is one of the disputed questions whether Boccaccio did not take some contemporary portrait as the basis of his description. Scartazzini, in his "Introduction to the Study of Dante," does not hesitate to say that a review of the abundant literature on Dante's portrait convinces him that probably we have not a single authentic picture of the great poet. "Who

would have painted it?" he asks. "Even granting that while he was one of the Priors of Florence, one had been hung in some public place, such a portrait, though according to Bruni, found in the Chiesa di Santa Croce, would undoubtedly have been destroyed at the time when Florence condemned, banished, cursed and would gladly have put to death her great son. It requires great credulity to believe that in such times the Florentines would have endured in a public place the portrait of a banished, cursed, detested citizen. The multitude of portraits of Dante that we possess are nothing else but fancy pictures, most likely inspired by Boccaccio's description."

We may also ask how much dependence may be placed on the authenticity of the death-mask which some claim gives an absolutely correct notion of his features. The sympathetic translator of the "Inferno," the late T. W. Parsons, exclaims:

> How stern of lineament, how grim,
> The father was of Tuscan song!

calls him "an anchorite" and continues the picture in these words:

The lips as Cumae's caverns close,
  The cheeks with fast and sorrow thin,
The rigid front, almost morose,
  But for the patient hope within. . . .

Peace dwells not here — this rugged face
  Betrays no spirit of repose;
The sullen warrior sole we trace,
  The marble man of many woes.

This stern prophet, before whom women shrank and children trembled as if he had been himself a sad-eyed ghost returned from the tomb, is portrayed by some of his biographers as standing on the shore of the Gulf of Spezzia near the monastery of Santa Croce del Corno, gazing out at the wondrous prospect. The monks struck by his pensive melancholy and evident burden of sorrows approached and asked him what he desired. He replied "Peace": —

The single boon for which he prayed
  The convent's charity was rest.

If they had asked him where in this world Peace was to be found he might have replied in the words of the "Paradiso": *In la sua voluntade e nostra pace* — In His will is our peace.

The stern Dante of the "Inferno" enthralls our imagination but still it is pleasant to conceive of him as a flaxen-haired lover writing sonnets

and *canzoni* to the beautiful ladies of Florence. In this fascinating pursuit he certainly showed precocity, but it is remarkable how little we really know of the facts. He himself tells us that he was born in Florence but what else is there that we can say of his father's family except names?

The weight of evidence seems to hold against nobility of origin. Neither his father's family nor his mother's was inscribed among the *nobili* or the *popolane* of the city. It is also significant that Giovanni Villani, a contemporary chronicler, does not speak of him as noble. Moreover, after the Florentines had passed a decree that no member of a noble family should take part in their affairs, Dante was elected Prior of the city. Apparently of so little importance was the Alighieri family that when the Guelfs, to which party it belonged, was politically allied, were driven from Florence by the Ghibellines in 1260, Alighiero, a humble bourgeois, either stayed behind with his second wife, whose name was Bella, or left her there. According to the best authorities the son that conferred not merely nobility but immortality on the name first saw the light in 1265. The details furnished by Boccaccio and other biographers in regard to

his family and education are wholly imaginary. How much truth, then, is there in Dante's own account of his first meeting with Beatrice? How far may we go in believing that this idealised maiden was an actual earthly love, a woman of living flesh and blood?

That she stands as a symbol no one can doubt. But it is always more interesting to us practical modern readers to interpret literally rather than etherialise characters into abstractions. We accept "Pilgrim's Progress" as an actual journey of actual people such as we meet every day, and the moment we take the heroes and heroines of Spenser's "Faërie Queene" as personified Virtues and Vices we lose all interest in them. Even the Song of Solomon is shorn of half its beauty when it is regarded as a prophetic illustration of the love of Christ for His Church. To be sure the internal development of Dante's life may be seen to follow metaphysical and allegorical lines. The mysticism can not be gainsaid: Dante himself bids us read between the lines. Students of a later day are too much inclined, however, to interpret them in accordance with modern transcendentalism, and of course there is room for discussion as to his meaning, but in

studying Dante one must never forget the difference between his viewpoint and ours. It is something like playing Bach sonatas on a modern concert-grand piano: we realise that while it may have been absolute music to the composer's inner sense yet he never heard them except as they were rendered on a tinkling clavichord tickled with a quill.

Now it is of very little importance whether or no we give credence to the literal interpretation of Dante's "Vita Nuova"; whether or no the *donna gentilissima* whom he says many called Beatrice was Messer Folco Portinari's daughter, who in 1286 married the Cavaliere Simon dei Bardi. There is known to have been such a Beatrice and she lived only a few steps from Dante's home. But the arguments against this tradition — for it is only tradition — are thoroughly convincing — to those who are not convinced of the contrary!

But there is no reason why we should regard "La Vita Nuova" as simply and solely allegorical. Dante says his most gentle lady was a year younger than himself, that she was born, lived and died in the Via del Corso, that at her father's death she was bowed with grief, that

she herself died in the first hour of the ninth of June, 1290, on the very threshold of the second period of her life: that is to say, at the age of twenty-four. He relates that the image of Beatrice that he wore imprinted on his heart was of such noble virtue that it never suffered Love to hold lordship over him without the faithful counsel of Reason; that it made his heart light and gay, inflamed him with holy charity, impelled him to love his neighbours and forgive his enemies, withdrew his imagination from all things vile, guided him in the straight path, and raised him to the love of the highest good, which is God.

After her fair limbs are laid in the dust he tells of their meetings and of the influence which his love for her had exerted upon his life and character. When first he saw her he was near the end and she was near the beginning of their ninth year:

"She appeared to me," he says, "clad in most noble colour, a modest and becoming red, and she was girt and adorned in such wise as suited her very youthful time of life."

The thrill that passed over him foretold the coming of the strong God destined to rule over

him, and this strong God commanded him oftentimes when he was a boy to seek to see that most youthful angel —*quest' angiola giovanissima* — who was his bliss, and he says that he saw her of such noble and praiseworthy deportment that in the words of Homer "she seemed not the daughter of mortal man but of God." And when nine years had passed since he first saw her, "it chanced that this admirable lady appeared to him again clad in whitest white [*colore bianchissimo*]— between two older ladies, and as she passed along the street she let her eyes fall upon him as he stood timidly regarding her and saluted him with such ineffable courtesy that it seemed to him that he then experienced all the bounds of bliss —[*tutti i termini della beatudine*]. For the first time her voice sounded in his ears and so intoxicated was he by the sweetness of it that he retired to his own chamber and dreamed that a marvellous vision appeared to him — a cloud of fire colour wherein he discerned the shape of his Lord, that is Love, who in his arms bore the Lady of the Salutation, sleeping, wrapt in a diaphanous robe of crimson cloth. In one hand he held the youth's heart all on fire and he awoke her that slept and pre-

vailed upon her to eat it and she ate it timidly. Then the lord of fearful aspect changed from joy to lament and as he wept he gathered up the lady into his arms and went away with her toward heaven."

From that moment, as expressed in the, to us, grotesque image of his lady devouring his flaming heart, love wastes his flesh; his appearance becomes grievous to his friends, nor could they doubt, since they saw so many signs of love in his face that it was love that was wasting him; but when they asked "for whom" he smiled and left them, as he left us, to conjecture. It certainly seems absurd that he should have seen the face of a girl who lived a few doors from him only twice in eighteen years and only once heard her voice.

But Dante's face, wasted by his youthful passion for this idealised love, appeals to our imagination. Would that we had it painted by Giotto!

There are many paintings in words which present Beatrice and her friends to us and they must all be interpreted to the eye in the style of the mediæval painters — a style that one perhaps grows to like. The environment is quite

certain to be ecclesiastical. He prefers to use a circumlocution for church. He calls it the place where are heard words concerning the Queen of Glory and where he could behold his bliss. This circumlocution is characteristic of Dante's prose style. He never calls Florence by name but rather speaks of it as the city where my lady was stationed by the all High Father — *la cittade ove la mia donna fu posta dall' Altissimo Sire* — or as the city where his *gentilissima donna* was born, lived and died.

In this church, between Dante and Beatrice, sat a gentle lady of very pleasing aspect who often looked at him, wondering that he should gaze at her; and many persons noticed it and supposed that the unnamed lady was the one who was wasting his life. So he allows her to be the screen of the truth and for months and years he dissembles, even writing rhymes for her, so as to keep his secret the more to himself.

Afterward he tells her how the Lord of the Angels summoned to his glory a young lady of the city of most gentle appearance who had been exceedingly beautiful; and he beheld her body lying without its soul in the midst of many ladies who were weeping piteously. And

because she had once been in the company of the lady of his heart he writes or devises two sonnets as a guerdon to her.

Then follow more visions: he goes on a journey and his most sweet lord appears to his imagination like a pilgrim meanly clad, out of spirits and gazing on a fair, rapid and most pellucid stream which flows along by the road where he is walking.

But when he returns to Florence he takes another lady for his screen and shield and cultivates her so assiduously that men impute vice to him; and his most gentle Beatrice, hearing the injurious gossip, when she sees him in a public place denies him her most sweet salute in which lay all his bliss. He retires to his chamber and after many tears and lamentations falls asleep. Love, whom he had called to his aid, appears like a youth clad in purest white and with grave and thoughtful face. The poet takes the occasion to compose another sonnet or rather, this time, a *ballata* which is to go forth on Love's trace and explain to the lady the reasons for his apparent faithlessness.

He next sees Beatrice at a wedding and the sight of her robs him of all his senses, even the

spirit of sight; and the ladies that are present beholding him as he leans against a mural painting, make mock at him together with Beatrice. "Ah!" he cries, "if this lady realised my state she would not make sport of me: she would rather have pity on me."

One more picture from "La Vita Nuova." He had been ill many days, suffering grievous anguish, and on the ninth day, as he thinks of the slight tenure of his life, it suddenly occurs to him that "gentlest Beatrice" must also some time die. Then bewilderment overcomes him, he closes his eyes in a sort of frenzy; ladies with dishevelled hair appear to him and say: "Thou too must die," and then strange faces horrible to behold come and say: "Thou art dead!"

Then he knows not where he is and it seems to him that the ladies with the dishevelled hair pass by piteously weeping and the sun grows dark and the stars change colour and, as it were, weep and the birds as they fly fall dead and mighty earthquakes occur. And a certain friend comes to him saying: "Dost thou not know? Thine admirable lady is departed from the world!" And as with streaming eyes

he looks toward heaven it seems to him he sees a multitude of angels returning thither, before them a cloudlet of exceeding whiteness and they sing gloriously Osanna in Excelsis.

So strong is his errant fancy that it shows to him the lady dead as she lay, her head covered with a white veil and face seeming to say: "Now do I behold the beginning of peace." It is only a vision but so real that he wakes with a sound of grievous lamentation and calls on Death to take him away. And a young and gentle lady, of nearest kinship, supposing it is the pain of his infirmity, weeps for fear and the other ladies in the chamber send her away and try to comfort him.

The Beatrice of the Vita Nuova died, according to Dante, on the ninth of June, 1290, and he vowed that if his life should be prolonged to say of her what was never said of any woman. He was to go to behold the glory of the lady of his soul, that blessed Beatrice who in heaven looked on the face of Him *qui est per omnia saecula benedictus!*

No modern critical spirit must breathe on this ideal picture of a mediæval Love. The tears and the sentimentality, the burning hearts

and the white-robed angels, the illness and the secrecy hiding or rather one might say betraying the affliction which was a delight were all a part of the phenomenon. In Florence where, according to the Troubadours, "joy and song and love were perfect and adorned," such a celebration of a heart-passion was natural and comprehensible. In June, 1283, a thousand or more men all clad in white gowns, with a leader called the Lord of Love, gave themselves up to games and sports and dancing and processions through the city with trumpets and other instruments of gaiety, and the festival lasted for two whole months and was the most famous ever held in Tuscany.

When a city or a nation suddenly awakens to a new life, intellectual or moral or religious or artistic, there is likely to be an excess of joy in all manifestations of the revival. In the early days of this country a new religious effervescence was called by the name of enthusiasm. Dante lived in the Florence of the thirteenth century: what splendours of fresh architecture, of noble painting, of rich sculptures must have delighted his eyes! What generous rivalry of letters and song! The "Purgatory" betrays his admiration

for the plastic arts; everywhere we find evidences of his love for music.

Nothing of political life, no reflection of the unsafer passions that were gathering for fatal explosion are to be found in the Vita Nuova. It is a simple love story with no plot: a succession of visions and love-poems, sonnets and *canzoni*, strung together with quaint and curiously symbolical artifice. One must understand the ancient significance of numbers to realize how the figure *nine* rules the destiny of Beatrice. The mystic three and one and three thrice multiplied plus one, making the so-called perfect number, regulate the arrangement of the poems, longer and shorter. Both Dante and Beatrice are nine or on the verge of nine when they first meet and twice nine when they meet again and the date of the fair lady's death is the ninth of June.

The "Divine Comedy" consists of three parts, aggregating a hundred cantos. Hell is laid out in nine circles, Purgatory in seven besides the Ante-Purgatory and the Terrestrial Paradise; Paradise has nine heavens. There are three wild beasts, three blessed women, three guides, three faces of Lucifer; even the verse is the *terza rima*.

Yet in spite of the artificiality and the laboured puns and conceits that are lavished in descriptions, in spite of the circumlocutions and the lack of definiteness, in spite of the symbolism and the allegory, Dante's Beatrice stands out as one of the most living and natural maidens in the world: real, because she appeals peculiarly to the imagination and therefore — because painted with the few masterly touches of the poet — most picturesque and beautiful. No details encumber the free play of fancy and therefore she is a maiden for all hearts to love whether depicted under the stiff draperies of a modern Prerafaelite or in the realism of a Dresden Koch — so pure, so chaste, so beautiful, so divine!

Gaspary sees in her the ideal of platonic love; but aside from the probability that Dante was wholly unacquainted with what we understand by platonic love, it seems to me that the utter one-sidedness of the passion is fatal to any such ideal: a platonic affection is a mutual exchange of love with the idea of possession excluded. The woman has the same interest in the man as the man has in the woman. Sex is ignored. But in Dante's case Beatrice is worshipped from

afar and, dying, becomes the regnant influence of his life. Had it been a vulgar earthly passion, had he dreamed of a union other than spiritual, the symbolical significance of the Vita Nuova would have been an absurdity. This lofty purity is what sets this golden book studded with gems above the Song of Solomon.

When we go from the Vita Nuova to the great Vision, we are assuredly in the domain of the symbolical. We may regard Dante himself in this marvellous journey under a twofold aspect: he represents humanity, he is the poet of the Vita Nuova. In either case Beatrice is something more concrete than abstract theology or even divine wisdom: she is abstract woman, she is also perhaps the Saving Church. But to us she is interesting only as the one woman, only as a picturesque figure, as seen by the poet as a man and not as a mediæval theologian.

It will be remembered that Dante in middle age — as he expresses it in his characteristic circumlocution, *nell mezzo del cammin di nostra vita* — finds himself wandering in a dark forest, prevented by three wild beasts from climbing the mountain that should bring him

to the Terrestrial Paradise; the first is a beautiful spotted panther, variously interpreted as meaning Florence or the sin of incontinence; the second is a rabid lion that makes the very air affrighted, this signifying France or pride or ambition or violence; and the third a lean she-wolf that seems burdened with hungry cravings, meaning Rome or fraud, or the avarice of the Guelfs or the hatred of Dante's enemies. Dante himself vouchsafes no explanation and the range of choice is very wide.

As he slowly retreats into the pass that had filled the lake of his heart with terror he beholds one who through long silence seemed feeble or hoarse. It is Vergil who has come to rescue him. Vergil throughout the Middle Ages is regarded as a powerful magician, a necromancer, the pagan prophet of Christianity. To Dante he is the honour and light of poetry, his master and his author, the one from whom alone he took the beautiful style — *lo bello stile* — that had done him honour, but in the mystic sense the type of right reason.

As Vergil proceeds to lead Dante through the eternal place where he should hear the despairing shrieks of those ancient spirits of woe who cry

out for the second death, he relates how the rescue came about:

"I was among those that dwell suspended in limbo, betwixt hell and heaven; and a lady blessed and beautiful [*beata e bella*] called me and I besought her to command. Her eyes shone brighter than the Sun or Venus and sweet and low she began in her own tongue with her angelic voice."

Here, by the way, is the excuse for Dante's composing the poem in Italian instead of Latin as at first he intended: the vernacular was vastly richer in poetic possibilities, for a living literature must have a spoken language as its organ and Beatrice's own tongue was the melodious Tuscan, young and beautiful daughter of Vergil's Latin. Those words of Vergil give to our ears the incomparable music of its form, so hopelessly beyond the power of any translation, prose or rhythmical, to express:—

E donna mi chiamo beata e bella
Tal che di comandar io la richiesi.
Lucevan gli occhi suoi più che la stella
E cominciommi a dir soave e piana
Con angelica voce in sua favella.

Beatrice tells the courteous Mantuan how, as she was sitting with the ancient Rachel, Lucia

(by whom the commentators understand Dante to mean illuminating grace) comes as a messenger from a gentle lady in heaven who breaks stern Judgment and disarms Justice, (this being either the Virgin Mary or the Divine Goodness personified), and tells her of the desperate strait of him who for love of her had deserted the vulgar herd and was now combating death beside the flood of passions and political tumults more stormy than the sea.

And Beatrice tells him how, swifter than men seek their advantage and flee their hurt, she had come down from that seat of beatitude, and as she said it, weeping she turned her lucent eyes upon him.

Is not that a picture to linger in the memory? Those two gracious figures, one of course in the Roman toga, the type of the noble Roman who used to meet Augustus at the villa of Maecenas, the other the beautiful Florentine Donna, the type of all that was loveliest and best in Italian womanhood, dressed, though a spirit, in robes such as she was wont to wear at Florentine festivals.

It is the only pleasant picture that relieves the gloom of hell unless one — as one must

indeed—except the description of Limbo. Dante and his serene Guide are welcomed there by four great shades — *quattro grand' ombre* — Homer, sword in hand, lord of the rest, the sovereign poet; Horace the Satirist, Ovid and Lucan; and they welcome Dante as the sixth. And together the fair school of that lord of loftiest song pass on until they reach the foot of a noble castle seven times girt by lofty walls, defended round about by a beautiful streamlet. They ford it as if it had been dry land and through seven gates enter upon a meadow of fresh verdure — *prato di fresca verdura* — where were people with slow and serious eyes, with great authority in their looks, who spake seldom but with sweet voices.

In an open place, lofty and luminous, were gathered all these great spirits on the enamelled green: Hector and Aeneas, Caesar in armour with his falcon eyes and Aristotle the Master of those that know, seated in the midst of the *filosofica famiglia*, all of whom looked up to him, all did him honour; and nearest to him Socrates and Plato and then all the pagan poets and great men, worthy of heaven indeed, but through fatal ignorance deprived of that

higher felicity but not unhappy, knowing not of the higher heavens for those that believed.

Out from that calm and quiet retreat Vergil leads Dante into the air that trembles, into the darkness that stifles and they begin the dread descent through the spiral circles narrowing down into the awful pits where the Damned are forever punished.

Dante has been criticised for his cruel imagination of the pangs of hell. But he only followed the fashion of his day and generation, he only accepted the faith of his Church. Moreover, viewed symbolically, each punishment is seen to be but the logical outcome of the special sin: blasphemers are seen lying prone in the desert of sand beaten by a rain of fire, their helplessness before God typified in their attitude; in the third pit those guilty of simony, who sold the precious pearl for worldly possessions, who sought the bad, who trod the good under foot, have now darkness for light, bitter for sweet, and are depicted with their heads and bodies in the dirt and their legs in the air. Thieves are changed into serpents, church-robbers, like Vanni Fucci, adding sacrilege to theft are burnt to all eternity in a consuming fire, ever sinking to ashes and rising

again like the phœnix. Mohammed, who rent the Christian Church, is split from chin to rump, while those guilty of cold treachery, unwarmed by a spark of feeling, are in the lowest deeps where the tears freeze in their eyes and they are themselves rigid with never-yielding frost.

In the eighth song, while they are crossing the turbid waters of the Styx in the ancient boat of Phlegyas, a soul full of filthy mud stretches out his two hands to them. Vergil thrusts him disdainfully back saying: "Away, with the other dogs" — *Via costa con gli altri cani* — and to Dante, after expressing a blessing on the mother who bore him, he expresses all his scorn for that *persona orgogliosa* — that haughty personage who together with proud kings like swine in the vile filth are now wallowing.

Dante replies: "Master, I should be full fain to see him swallowed up in this mire before we depart from the lake."* Vergil assures him that it is fitting he should have such a wish gratified, and a moment later he beholds him in such torment under the

* *Maestro, molto sarei vago*
Di vederlo attuffare in questa broda
Prima che noi uscissimo del lago.

attentions of the *fangosi genti* — the filthy tribe — that he praises and thanks God for it. Thus Dante revenges himself on Filippo Argenti whom he calls *lo fiorentino spirito bizarro*, where the strange word *bizarro* seems to mean "of wily but inexorable temper."

The most familiar picture from the "Inferno" is that of Francesca da Rimini and Paolo, her lover, borne swiftly on the murky air — *aer nero* — like starlings, hither, thither, up and down — *di quà, di l'*, *di giù, di sù* — so light upon the wind. And when for one brief moment the wind is silent come those million-times cited lines:

Nessun maggior dolore
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria.

But are they true — those words so entirely contrary to those others:

'T is better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all?

If Paolo and Francesca loved guiltily and were punished in accordance with the nature of their crime, was not most of the bitterness removed by the fact that they were at least together through the long æons of measureless time? Or can

we read into the punishment the quite modern idea that their enforced companionship was a greater torment than separation would have been? In accordance with the materialism of the "Divine Comedy" the physical agonies of the damned were even keener than they would have been in the flesh. But, evidently, Dante, whose stern being was nevertheless attuned to all the harmonies of love, felt deep sorrow for the hapless pair who though technically guilty, have more than any historic lovers carried the sympathy of the world. The few lines in which the story is told contain the quintessence of a tragedy which has been elaborated into long dramas, has been presented on the lyric stage and has inspired the rhapsodies of the greatest musicians. Nowhere is Dante's art more admirably illustrated than in that final line of Francesca's pathetic explanation where never once she complains of Fate or hints that the punishment is undeserved. Having told of the temptation and of the fatal kiss she hints at the jealous husband's vengeance in these words: *Quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante* —"We read no further in the book that day."

Among the multitude of picturesque though horrible details in the "Inferno" perhaps the ride of the two Poets on the huge shoulders of the monster Geryon from the seventh circle — of those that have done violence to Art — down to the eighth where Pope Nicholas III suffers, is the most striking: We see the huge dragon stretching out his long tail, gathering in the air with his paws and moving his mighty vans. "I was in the air on every side," says Dante. "Every sight vanished save that of the dragon. It went away, swimming slowly, slowly wheeled and descended, but I perceived it not save that the wind blew on my face and from below."

Every detail fills the mind with the satisfaction of vision: it is a triumph of description.

Another picture from the "Inferno" which haunts the memory is that of the monarch of the dolorous realm with his three faces, red, yellow and black, with his six enormous wings like those of a bat and flapping forth three winds congealing all Cocytus:

"With his six eyes he weeps and over his three chins trickle the tears and the bloody slaver, while in his three mouths he is crunching with his teeth, like a hemp-masher, Judas

Iscariot, Brutus and Cassius"—the three champion traitors of the world.

Tutto avem veduto — they had seen it all. They have now reached the centre of the earth which according to the Ptolemaic system is also the centre of the Universe, and when at last they pass through the hidden passage to return to the bright world, they behold through a round aperture the beauteous things that the heavens bear and once more look upon the stars. It has been a long hard journey for only four and twenty hours. The rest of his pilgrimage takes much more time to accomplish and seems to offer far less in the way of picturesque detail. The descriptions are more transcendental and offer less occasion to the artist that would attempt to illustrate the poem. The concrete shapes, though so horrible, that swarm through the pages of the "Inferno," give place to brilliant lights, to angelic songs.

Exquisitely beautiful and pictorial is the beginning of the "Purgatory." At the very first we have the atmosphere like soft Oriental sapphire; the fair planet that incites to love makes all the East smile, the heavens seem to rejoice in the four stars — symbols of the four

cardinal virtues, Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude and Justice; and the contrast to the fearful region which we have just left makes all the more vivid the beauty of the hopeful landscape which is introductory to the region of purgative pains.

After speech with the younger Cato who appears like an aged man with a reverend white beard and his face illumined by the rays of the four holy stars, they pass across the plain until they behold the glittering sea —*il tremolar della marina*, and soon they come to the shores of those desert waters which man crosses only once. How beautiful is the approach of the swift boat — preceded by a light swifter than aught earthly flies, and guided by the angel of God, the Celestial Pilot in the stern and a convoy of a hundred spirits singing together with one voice!

The description of the gate of Purgatory is fine with its symbolical three steps: the first of white marble, mirror-like, polished; the second of rugged rock, rough, coarse-grained and cracked; the third of fiery porphyry like blood that gushes from the vein; and the silent warder dressed in ashen gray standing on the topmost

step with naked sword reflecting dazzling rays and holding the silver and the golden key.

Then when they have entered they pass the walls sculptured with a multitude of intaglios each so lovingly described. It is interesting to note that Dante expressed his belief that Polykleitos, the Greek sculptor, was able to surpass Nature in his art and he practically recommends the practice of adorning churches with representations of Biblical scenes so that those unable to read might through their eyes win instruction.

Vergil accompanies Dante through most of the circles of Purgatory and when at last the seven P's, standing for the *peccavi* of the seven mortal sins, have been cleared from the poet's brow Vergil pronounces his will free, upright and sane — *Libero, dritto, sano è tuo arbitrio*— and he is ready to enter into the terrestrial paradise.

It is supposed that Dante got his inspiration for the scenery of the earthly paradise from his memory of Ravenna where he lived two years — the heavenly forest dense and green — *la divina foresta spessa e viva* —through which he makes his way, the soil everywhere breathing fragrance, the wind making low music in the pines, his brow

cooled by the soft breeze — blowing toward the west, the river of clear waters with grasses bending down to meet their own reflections, the varied May blossoms full of dew and amid them the fair lady, Matilda, the type of virtuous activity, who appears solitary singing like a maid in love — *cantando come donna innamorata*. She gathers the flowers that paint her pathway:—

> Then as fair lady moving in the dance
> Turns with her soles just lifted from the ground
> And scarcely one foot forward doth advance,
> She among red and golden flowers turned round
> To me.

She leads him forward and exclaims "My brother look and listen" —*Frate mio, guarda e ascolta*. A sweet melody runs through the luminous air; under the green branches is seen something like a blazing fire and the sweet sound becomes a song. A fair array brighter than the full moon in March approaches: there are people clad in spotless white; the water of the stream grows resplendent; flamelets like streaming pennants mark the air with seven broad zones of colour like a rainbow and four and twenty elders crowned with fleur de lys walk two by two singing "Blessed art

thou among the daughters of Adam and blessed forever be thy beauties."

These are followed by four living creatures — *animali* — crowned with bright green leafage, each feathered with six wings, argus-eyed. Then comes a triumphal two-wheeled chariot drawn by a gryphon — half eagle, half lion, typifying the dual nature of Christ: the bird-members gold, the rest vermilion and white. Three ladies, representing (it is supposed) Faith, Hope and Charity, one, ruddy as fire, one like bright emerald, one white as new-fallen snow, come dancing about the chariot on the right; on the left are four in festal array, dressed in imperial purple; these are the four cardinal virtues and the colour of their garb typifies their dominance over human life. These take their step from their leader, Prudence, whose three eyes look at the past, the present and the future. Then come two old men and four others humble in appearance, representing and personifying the latter books of the Testament. They are robed in white and are crowned with roses. And a hundred voices sing *Benedictus qui venis* and those lovely words from the Aeneid,

manibus o date lilia plenis —"scatter lilies in handfuls."

And now to Dante's streaming eyes appears, within a cloud of flowers falling within and without the chariot, a lady with an olive-wreath, symbol of peace and wisdom, above a white veil and robed in colour of living flame under a green mantle: the three colours of Faith, Charity and Hope. Vergil suddenly vanishes. The lady hid by the veil and circled by the leaf of Minerva haughty in her manner cries: "Behold me! Beatrice am I" — *Guardami ben: ben son, ben son Beatrice!* With the sternest reproach in her voice she asks how he dares to approach the mountain. And his eyes cast down see his own shame reflected in the clear crystal stream. Then she grows silent and the angels sing in Latin: "In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust." And their compassion for him causes the ice around his heart to melt and the breath and water with anguish pour from his breast through his mouth and through his eyes.

But when she has sufficiently humiliated him and filled him with contrition, Matilda drags him into the stream and then the beautiful lady opens her arms, clasps his head and causes him

to swallow some of the water which brings forgetfulness of sins, and when he had thus been bathed she brings him within the minuet of the four Beautiful Ones — the cardinal virtues, and each of them covers him with her arm.

All this richness of symbolical but picturesque imagery would form a panoramic frieze such as it would seem an Abbey might take delight in realising.

The "Paradiso" offers far less of satisfying illustrative material. One reads on and on, as in a mist of indefinite light and with ineffable sounds of music ringing in the ears. All one feels is that Dante is with his thrice-sanctified mistress in bliss unspeakable. One could not depict with success the strange bodiless dance of the two companies of saints so elaborately compared to the marshalling of the stars of heaven. No artist could satisfactorily portray such supernal flights of the poet's imagination. No, to find fit and agreeable pictures one must travel back into the "Purgatory" and there occasionally will come across a hint of a landscape such as the patient copyer of mediæval missals loved to introduce into his illuminations, such as this for instance in the seventh canto:

Twixt hill and plain a winding path did trend
Which led within the bosom of the vale,
To where the ledge doth more than half descend.
Gold, silver, crimson, ceruse splendour pale,
The Indian wood so lucent and serene,
Fresh emerald, when its outer coat doth scale,
Placed in that vale the plants and flowers between,
Would each and all be found surpassed in hue,
As less by greater overpowered is seen.

Alas, that no translation can do justice to the music of that exquisite verse! Dante had all the mediæval delight in green. The two angels with the two pointless swords that appear in the seventh book of the "Purgatory" are dressed in green like new born leaves, and spread green wings. That does not comport with our usual idea of angels but possibly amid the throng of dazzlingly white spirits the eye might find infinite rest in verdant-winged angels.

No one can doubt that Dante was an artist. To say nothing of his mastery of poetic form, his loving reference to colour and to plastic creation shows how thoroughly permeated he was with the spirit that at that time was beginning to spread through Italy and was to bring forth such wonderful paintings, statues and architecture. The obligation of art to the great poet has never been sufficiently realised; it never can be.

III

LYRIC POETRY AND PETRARCA

I

THE sun of Poesy shone bright on the lovely lands of Provence. Numberless Troubadours went wandering through Europe — gay, vagrant bards, furnished with lute and voice, hovering like musical birds in the perfumed atmosphere of luxurious courts and restlessly enjoying their chance existences.

Thus Pierre Vidal is found in Spain and Hungary and the Far East. In 1189 he was with the Marchese Bonifacio in Montferrat where he delighted the nobles with his praises of a fair Lombarda. In 1205 he was in the Island of Malta with Count Enrico. Rambauld de Vaquieras also came to Montferrat and so won favour that the Marquis made him a chevalier and brother-in-arms. He sang of Bonifacio's sister or daughter, with whom he had very intimate relations. In 1194 he went to Sicily with the Marquis whose life he saved in a battle near Messina. In 1202 he went with him to

Jerusalem where five years later he perished by his side. These are only two out of numberless examples of similar relationships.

The Troubadours taught their art to the cultured inhabitants of upper Italy, where Provençal became an almost twin language with Tuscan. Princes and ladies caught the trick of song. Beatrice d'Este, the daughter of Azzo VI. and Emilia of Ravenna, sang of chivalrous love.

Not merely of love did the Troubadours sing: they took active part in politics, choosing sides in the great conflicts between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines, urging Emperors to greater zeal against proud Milan or Genova *la superba.*

Uc de Saint Circ, in a poem addressed to Count Guido Guerra and other Italian Guelfs, displays the bitterest hatred against Frederic the Heretic, threatens his supporters with misfortunes and urges Francis and the Church to a crusade against the Empire, "for the infidel should have no land."

Then if ever in the history of the world a single song was worth more than the ablest Latin pamphlet.

If the Italians wrote sometimes in Provençal,

Rambauld de Vaquieras himself at least twice composed Italian verse. In one song he makes a beautiful Genoese speak in her own dialect, and these verses are regarded as among the most ancient in Italian: they must have been written before 1200, for about that time he left Italy never to return.

The dialect of Northern Italy being not so very different from Provençal, the imitators seemed not to think of raising their own tongue to the dignity of a poetic function; in copying they copied both the model and the language in which the model was composed.

The most celebrated of the Italian Troubadours was Sordello of Mantua, who is praised by Dante in his treatise of "Popular Eloquence," and, in the sixth and succeeding cantos of the "Purgatory" is transfigured as the type of generous patriotic pride. He wrote the "Treasure of Treasures," but his works are Provençal if his fame is Italian.

Curiously, but at the same time naturally enough, Sicily was where Italian poetry first began. Northern Italy was too near Marseilles, celebrated by Raimon de Tors as the abode of valour, courtesy, love, song and pleasure; Cen-

tral Italy had no splendid courts, but in Sicily still lingered the beneficent effects of the preceding Arab civilisation, and Federigo II. endeavoured to maintain and even enhance these conditions. He was in every way a remarkable man: interested in science and literature, excelling all his contemporaries in culture and statesmanship. He founded the University of Naples in 1224, collected Arabic and Greek manuscripts and had them translated. He introduced Aristotle to Italy; rhetoric flourished at his court. He had his faults; if he favoured reform it was because he hated the Papal power, but he burnt heretics because he saw in them dangers to his state. The Papal party declared that he denied the immortality of the soul, and Dante placed him in hell as a heretic and atheist in spite of the admiration which he felt for him. He tolerated Mussulmans; he was on friendly terms with the Sultan of Egypt and he followed Oriental usages in maintaining an extensive harem. Indeed, he was called the Baptised Sultan of Sicily, and he deserved the epithet by reason of his love of wisdom, his despotic powers so strangely mixed with magnanimity, and his brutal sensuality.

Though under his immediate predecessors Arabic poetry had flourished in Sicily, its influence entirely vanished under the Provençal poetry of love. Federigo, his son Enzo, King of Sardinia, his favourite statesman, Pier della Vigna of Capua, all wrote verse under this influence. The life of Della Vigna, even to its tragic ending in 1249, is one long romance.

But otherwise little is known of the Sicilian school except their names and the places from which they came. As their verse was founded on Provençal models, it lacked freshness and originality. The new language seemed to exert no vivifying influences. They all sang chivalrous love — a love which, tested by a standard of purity, was far from golden. The truth about the Troubadours can hardly be told unless in French. Yet this chivalrous love, as expressed in song, represents humble and suppliant adoration: service and obedience are its keynotes. The Troubadour is unworthy; the lady is cruel and causes him to languish in vain; his sorrows bring him even to death, but he will never cease to love her, since from love are derived all valour and virtue. He must, therefore, persevere; faithful service may help him to

reach the summit of his desires: suffering and death will give him honour and glory, since he dies for the *nobilissima donna*.

In Provence this ideal of love, artificial as it seems, was indigenous, springing from a real condition of things, from an actual state of society. It had a certain amount of warmth and sincerity, delicacy, elegance. But transplanted into Italy, after it had outlived its full maturity and was already beginning to wane, it bore very unsatisfactory fruit. The imported thoughts and sentiments corresponded to no real life: Italy, Sicily, had no feudal chivalry. Their festivals and tourneys were stage celebrations. What did Federigo with his seraglio, guarded by eunuchs, know or care for an ideal love? What did he do for the once powerful nobility of the Island but hold it under his iron hand and do his best to destroy it?

The ancient Sicilian lyric, of which he wrote no small number of delightful examples, is therefore marked by what Gaspary calls a pallid conventionality. *Madonna* is always the very image of abstract perfection, without life and without movement. She is the flower of women, the fragrant rose; she is the mirror of beauty, like

the morning star; her splendour excels that of pearls and precious stones; all excellent qualities belong to her and from her are derived all the prizes that poets boast. Love is an abstraction, a personification, a being with whom the poet talks and to whom he confesses his woes.

Colourless, stiff and immobile are the relations of the lovers in all these conventional poems. *Madonna* is forever cold; the suitor is sighing out his vows, humbling himself in the dust scarcely daring to hope; in view of his undying love will she not mitigate his torment? Here is an example from the works of the Emperor Federigo:

Oh give me courage, sweetest lady mine,
Whose heart before thee humbly doth incline.
And while I bow what right have I
To such a wished-for gift of love,
Save that I hope and still shall hope,
Save that belief is strong in me
That joy will make my heart beat high
That hope in thee alone doth move,
That without thee I blindly grope
And none on earth would serve but thee.
And when thy lovely face I see,
My dearest love I feel great joy.
I trust thou knowest no annoy
But rather pleasure in my service free,
Oh thou who art the flower of womankind,
Most perfect, most delightful, most refined!

Here are the well-remembered commonplaces; and in others of the same school one constantly comes across the idea that from the beloved no guerdon were better than the greatest from other women. He would not be king at the cost of losing her. Love is frequently depicted as a fire; the lover is like gold tried in this fire. Passion is the tempestuous sea. The lover's kiss is conventionalised as the spear of Peleus whose wounds can be healed only by touching them again with the same deadly weapon. Forever appear the old stand-bys: Paris and Helen, Pyramus and Thisbe, Tristan and Isolde.

Another characteristic is the introduction of some of the fabulous animals of the Bestiaries, so popular in the Middle Ages. The lover living in the fire is like the salamander; the lady killing with her eyes is compared to the basilisk; the song of the dying swan is heard; the tiger robbed of her young has her mission. The panther attracting other animals by her odorous breath is a type of the lady who lures by her grace.

A considerable part of this conventional ornamentation is attributed to Richard de Bar-

bézien who was especially popular in Italy. Yet in Sicily there was some attempt to be original and to invent new images. "Water," says Guido delle Colonne in one of his *canzone*, "is only heated and not destroyed by fire because of the wall of the cup separating them: so he himself who once had been like cold water, yea, like unto ice, has been heated to the boiling point by love and would have entirely evaporated had it not been for *madonna*." Certainly this making a sort of tea-kettle of his inamorata is delightfully original!

In another poem the suffering lover declares that just as the load-stone can attract iron only because it uses air as a medium, so love observes that *madonna* is required to draw the lover to himself.

The metrical form, as might be expected, takes all sorts of curious conventionalities, reminding one of the seventeen-syllable 五七五 *hokku* of the Japanese. The *canzone* consisted of strophes of similar structure and equal length, with a shorter one at the end called *comiato*, *congedo*, *licenza*, *chiusa* or *ritornella*. The art consisted in variety of accents, in choice or neglect of caesural pauses, in the judicious

and musical mixture of open or close vowel sounds. In Italian double, or feminine, rhymes prevail—the sharp masculine rhyme being almost as comic to the Southern ear as the triple rhyme to ours, and therefore reserved usually for humorous verse.

The length of the lines varied but the most prevalent were the endecasyllabic and the *settenario;* these two were chiefly employed in later times by Petrarca whose example made these meters classic.

The Italian strophe was generally more complicated than the Provençal and more rarely lacks the artificial division. This consisted of two parts similar in construction, called by Dante *pedes*, and one of different form called *syrma.* Sometimes there were four divisions: three *pedes* and a *versus.*

The Provençal was rather richer in rhymes than even the Italian, and the Troubadours delighted in carrying the same rhyme-scheme through their poems: these were known as *coblas unisonans*, while the Italians introduced new rhymes called *coblas singulares.*

The sonnet arose from the tripartite strophe of the *canzone* and in its origin is nothing more

than the singular strophe adopted by the Troubadours under the name of *coblas esparsas*, especially designed to convey moral precepts.

The Sicilians rarely used the sonnet-form. There is one by Pier della Vigna, one by King Enzo, one by Mazzo Ricco and a few by Iacopo da Lentini. As if in atonement for this lack they made use of a lyric form called *Discord* corresponding to the Provençal *Descort* or *Lais*. Here was no division into strophes. They were generally very brief; and as they were probably meant to be sung, not too much attention was lavished on their meaning. Here is an example of one and it would defy the most skilful translator or *oversætter*, as the Norwegians significantly name the rash poet that tries to cross the turbulent stream of poesy, for the meaning is elusive and the form is vaporous:

Si mi sdura
Scura
Figura
Di quant' eo ne veio
Gli occhi avere
E vedere
E volere
E loro no disio.

It was written by Iacopo da Lentini.

It is remarkable that a good deal of the Sicilian poetry is so modern in form and so free from any admixture of Sicilian dialect. Some theorists have argued that we have these poems not as they were originally written but as later translations into Tuscan. Dante praises Guido delle Colonne and others of the Sicilians for having risen above the vulgar vernacular and made a purer and nobler language. The school of Sicilian poetry ceased only about forty years before his day.

It is certainly a remarkable circumstance that in three great departments of literature — the drama, lyric poetry and the modern novel — Sicily should have played such an important part. But still more remarkable is it that in at least two of these departments the impulse to a national literature should have come from aliens and enemies.

Federigo II. and his prime minister, Pier della Vigna, were foreigners both, but they lived as frequently in Naples as in Palermo and thus cultivated that wonderfully pure Italian which so puzzles the student in that it seems to have sprung almost perfect from the head of its parent Latin, as Minerva is fabled to have sprung

from the brain of Jupiter, without any visible signs of a long and painful gestation. And again, it is wonderful that between the day of the Sicilians whose poems are the earliest known and the forerunners of the great school of Tuscan song, not quite a century can be reckoned. One fragment attributed to Cuillo d'Alcamo mentions Saladin as living in his day and this seems to place him at the end of the twelfth century — about 1193 — and Dante was banished from Florence in 1202.

There is still another reason to explain the exceptional purity of the Sicilian Italian of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and that is the fact that Federigo II. attracted to his court poets from many different provinces, and the elegance and refinement of the society tended to smooth down the crudenesses which they might have brought with them. It is interesting to notice how, the more nearly one approaches the poetry of the people, the more simple, natural and effective it becomes. The dreary conventionalities disappear. The lady-love is no longer cold and distant and severe; the lover no longer humbles himself in the dust; he awakes from his indolent posture of adoration, and if he mourn

it is because he must leave her, though he may envy his own heart because that at least is left in her keeping. While far away from her, in camp, or on the crusade, he remembers her lovely eyes —*suoi bei occhi* — and her bright tresses — *biondi tressi.*

In some cases the lady is described as descending from the windows of her palace and throwing herself into the poet's arms. She is represented with a little animation when she talks — weeping, expostulating, using her eyes. And it is undoubtedly a more honest poetry. For the cold and apparently chaste verse of the Troubadours was only a whited sepulchre; the chivalrous love of the Middle Ages was fair only on the outside; the courts of honour were dens of dishonour and the real truth of Feudalism cannot be told.

The dramatic element that is to be detected in some of the early fragments of Sicilian verse is indicative of an approaching change. For instance in one *contrasto*, or dialogue, beginning *Rosa fresca aulentissima* — "Fresh fragrant rose that bloomest in the springtime" — a man and woman are represented as engaged in lively conversation. He prays her to listen; she

resists. He grows petulant, she becomes angry and threatens to go into a convent or kill herself.

It was long supposed that this fresh and lively poem was the production of a poet endowed with the name of Cielo dal Camo. By the middle of the sixteenth century it had become transmogrified into Cuillo — which is a form of Vencenzo — d'Alcamo, and the inhabitants of the little city of Alcamo became so proud of their supposed poet that they called a *piazza* by his name and actually raised a monument to his memory. But the poet of Alcamo is as great a myth as Wilhelm Tell. The story proves very abundantly that the poet that writes a single good lyric which appeals to the world's heart and is never forgotten is more fortunate than the more ambitious genius that leaves behind him an epic which may be called great but is never read except as a curiosity or an exercise for students of literature.

The growth of the myth about Cuillo d'Alcamo is an interesting phenomenon. It was generally decided that as the young woman who is the heroine of his poem speaks of the wealth of the Saladin, her lover must have been a great feudal baron, owner of cities and castles. Hal-

lam, in his "History of the Middle Ages," says: "There is not a vestige of Italian poetry older than a few fragments of Cuillo d'Alcamo, a Sicilian, who must have written before 1193, since he mentions Saladin as then living."

Not until 1875 was it settled from internal evidence of the language of the poem itself that it could not have been written before 1231 and it is now regarded by the best judges as either a solitary example of the ancient popular poetry of Sicily or, more probably, an imitation of one by a so-called *cantor di piazza*. In either case it is far more interesting than the vast majority of the poems that have come down to us and are preserved in the great collection at the Vatican.

By 1266 the lyric poetry of chivalry and love had ceased to produce any flowers in Sicily; but Florence, which had been rapidly growing in wealth and culture, was ready to adopt the beautiful art.

The founders of this new lyric school were Guido Guinicelli, Guittone d'Arezzo and Guido Cavalcante. Guittone d'Arezzo composed his great *canzone* on the Battle of Monte Aperti just before the birth of Dante. It was a political satire on that battle when the Guelfs of Florence

were disastrously defeated by the Sienese and King Manfred's cavaliers, and the Ghibellines who had been expelled two years before returned in triumph. Guittone, like Dante, Brunetto Latini and Petrarca's father, was a Guelf and he laments the fallen city overturned by its own sons and subjected to the German sword and the enemies of their commune. It seems heavy and prosaic to us, but it has some energy as he depicts "Florence, that ever reviving flower," calling in her enemies and conquered by force and the Sienese when she ought to be Queen of Tuscany.

All of these early versifiers borrowed phrases and ideas and conventional forms of speech from the Troubadours of Provence. It was a decided advance, however, on the former custom of writing in Provençal.

Among the favourite amusements of these singers was the composition of *tenzoni* in which two poets are represented as comparing their lady-loves. Thus Dante de Maiano (who was born near Fiesole) demands of Tommaso da Faenza an answer to the question: "What is the greatest pang of love?" Another favourite exercise would be the defence of some such

question as "Whether it is wiser to court a maiden than a widow," and this would be conducted in a long sequence of sonnets.

As a general thing love in the Middle Ages had nothing to do with maidenly affections. It may be imagined that a country which even in our own day and generation tolerated the strange system of the *cavaliere servente* — typified in Lord Byron's relations with the Countess Guiccioli — was even less strict in the Middle Ages. The *mariage de convenance* made its own allowance for the demands of natural passion and thus one of the strange phenomena of humanity is easily and naturally explained. We no longer wonder at Dante or Petrarca addressing their sonnets to ladies honestly wedded and the mothers of respectable families.

The artificiality of these sonneteers is quite peculiar and deserves mention because the conventions affected the greatest of their successors and thus had an influence on all the poetry of the modern world. Verbal conceits abound; quibbles are artfully introduced. Thus the word *amore* which means love is of malice prepense confused with *amaro*, which means bitter.

In the same way Petrarca rings the changes on *l'aura*, the breeze and *lauro* the laurel and *Laura*, the fair object of his passion.

Complications of internal rhymes also attest the ingenuity, if not the inspiration, of the school of Guittone, as for example:

Similemente — gente — criatura
La portatura — pura — ed avvenente
Faite plagente — mente — per natura
Si che 'n altura — cura — volagente.

These difficult and complicated rhyming schemes are called in Provençal *rims cars* — dear rhymes. Alliterations, repetitions, verbal conceits, naturally led to affectation of far-fetched obscurity. A poet devoted to such filigree work was Arnaut Daniel, who was praised by Dante in the twenty second canto of the "Purgatory" "as a better smith of the maternal speech" than Guido Guinicelli. "In love-verses and romantic prose," Dante makes Guido say — in *versi d'amore e prose di romanze soverchio tutti* — "he surpassed all," and he compliments him by writing eight lines in Provençal.

Guittone d'Arezzo grew more and more addicted to this metaphysical and obscure style, until it became almost a disease. At first he

sang of love: without love there could be no excellence, so he begs love to enter into him and inform him. He urges his old master Bandino to teach him the secret. But suddenly by an impulse not at all uncommon in the Middle Ages, he turns from human love to love divine. At the age of thirty-five he abandons wife and child, accepting literally the words of Scripture, enters the order of the Cavalieri di Santa Maria; he condemns his former life and his own sonnets and *canzoni* in which he had sung of love, and gives himself up to dry sermonising on the existence of God, in scholastic language, with which he mixes citations from Aristotle and Cicero, Seneca and Boethius. He died in 1294.

These earlier poets were constantly making experiments in poetic forms and working the sonnet into its permanent classic shape. The very megatherium of verse is the *sonnetto doppio*, and equally uncouth is the *sonnetto renterzato*; in length and portentous bulk comes the ichthyosaurus of sonnets consisting of four *quartine* and three *terzine*. One relic of those antediluvian forms, as the camel and elephant are relics of prehistoric fauna, is the tailed sonnet, one example of which was left by Milton.

Chiaro Davanzati had some skill in such conceits. Thus, in one of his dialogues in sonnet form he says: "It chanced to me as to the bird that flies away and comes not back. In the pasture which it finds delightful it dwells and remains: thus my heart has flown to thee." A Japanese poet-emperor might have said that.

But his love replies: "I deny that I have thy heart, and, if I had, I would give it back to thee."

In another sonnet Chiaro says: "The light or sun when he appears resplendent sends brightness into every darkest part; such virtue hath his gaze, so superior to all other is his splendour; so doth *madonna* fill with joy at sight of her whoever hath a pang."

Dante copies the same pretty conceit. Chiaro Davanzati fought in the famous battle of Monte Aperti and was dead in 1280: that is nearly all that is known about him.

Hitherto, in Italian verse as in the typical verse of the Troubadours, the donna —*madonna* to use the sweet Tuscan word — is an abstraction, or at least a painting removed from the passions of the every-day world; but as the transition begins we find a more realistic state of things. Thus in the *canzoni* of Compa-

gnetto da Prato we catch glimpses of women unhappily wedded and pouring out their complaints into the ears of their lovers. It seems like folk-poetry in many cases, and certainly the morality, or affectation of morality, vanishes when a poem represents a girl complaining that her father intends to marry her to a man whom she detests and her lover comforts her by bidding her unhesitatingly to take the hated spouse as so many others do, since this impediment will not prevent their loving each other still and being happy:

Assai donne mariti anno
Che da lor son forte odiati
De' be' sembianti lor danno

Però non son di più amati
Cosi voglio che tu faccia
Ed avrai molta gioia.

In other cases the wife is represented as earnestly desirous of the death of her spouse: in presence of others she would weep and would even wear decent-appearing weeds of mourning, but secretly she would rejoice; like the young widow who went into the parlour where lay the cold and rigid form of her aged millionaire husband and bending over the coffin was heard to

exclaim: "The Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

The discovery of the lost works of Aristotle had a profound influence on the thought of the thirteenth century; this was speedily shown in the productions of the poets, and was first shown in the new school of Bologna. Guido Guinicelli was the founder of this sweet new style —*dolce stil nuovo*. Dante finds him in purgatory and speaks of him as

> *il padre*
> *mio e degli altri miei miglior che mai*
> *Rime d'amore usar dolci e leggiadre,*

thus confessing his indebtedness to him for the sweet and graceful rhymes of love. Guinicelli confesses to Dante that he and those with him — too numerous to call by name — had sinned by obeying no human law, by following their appetites like animals, but he says:

> *Son Guido Guinicelli e già mi purgo*
> *Per ben dolermi primo ch'allo stremo.*

Repentance before death would ultimately bring about his redemption and Dante confesses his sorrow when he hears the words of him whom he calls father of himself and of his betters.

Then Guinicelli asks Dante why in speech and look he held him dear. Dante replies:—

li dolci detti vostri,
Che quanto durerà l'uso moderno
Faranno cari ancora i loro inchiostri—

"Your sweet ditties, which as long as the modern fashion shall endure will make dear their manuscripts."

This Guido Guinicelli was of a noble family of Bologna, but almost all that is known of him is that he died in 1276. He was a disciple of Guittone, whom he calls *caro padre mio*. At first he followed the style of the Sicilian school and in his early verses are seen the same commonplaces, the same images and similitudes, the same vacuity and monotony. But when he outgrew the old idea that love was derived from the senses and exerted his force through the eyes, he established a loftier ideal. Love has his throne only in the noble heart.

Guido Guinicelli compares the search of Love for a home in some generous breast to the bird seeking amid green foliage its blessed nest. To him nobility of heart and love are as inseparable as the sun and its splendour. Just as the gem when purified from all that

contaminates absorbs the virtue of the sun, so the heart, made pure and noble, is inflamed by sight of the beloved lady. Here seems to be the origin of Dante's flaming heart in the "Vita Nuova." And just as water quenches flame, so all impurity puts an end to love.

Again *madonna* becomes the abstract compendium of all perfections — the very symbol and incarnation of superior qualities. The impure chivalrous passion of the Troubadours is refined into a spiritual love.

We now begin to meet the figure of the *madonna* transmuted into an angel come straight from heaven. Thus Lapo Gianni sings:

Angelica figura nuovamente
Dal ciel venuta a spender tua salute,
Tutta la sua virtute
Ha in te locata l'alto dio d'Amore.

This rapid survey brings us directly to Dante who had the manner of thought of his predecessors and the same theory of poetry, the same spiritualised concept of love. But while he uses the poetic apparatus of Guittone and Guinicelli, he rises superior to them by his greater genius, his more powerful imagination. Dante reminds one of Palestrina. Just as

"the Saviour of Music" confined himself to the strictest laws of counterpoint but by his spontaneous invention secured effects not dreamed of before, so Dante excelled all his predecessors and eclipsed them as the sun quenches the light of the morning stars.

II

In passing from Dante to Petrarca we come into another world. Dante closes an era: he is the Titan of Italian poetry; with him the mediæval is summed up forever.

Petrarca is as modern as Chaucer. Just as in midsummer, sometimes, a few days of genuine spring weather seem to stray like summer birds from their exile in the South, as if impatient to be at home once more, so we find simultaneously in England and Italy these two modern men centuries ahead of their day. How gay, unsentimental, free from morbidness, from provincialism is Dan Chaucer! He was of humble origin, the name signifying shoemaker, and yet he rose to be courted by kings and emperors and

one of his descendants just missed inheriting the throne of England.

So Petrarca, as is proved by the name, which means Little Peter or Peterkin, sprang from the common people. His father was Ser Petracco di Ser Parenza — unable even to boast a family name — and when he was driven from Florence by that miserable squabble between the two factions that were always tearing the vitals of the city, he carried away with him on that January day in 1302 only a small part of the possessions which he had accumulated as a jurist.

The misfortune which befell Italy had been prognosticated. In September, 1301, a comet flamed in the western sky and twice that year Saturn and Mars had been in conjunction in the sign of the Lion which was the astrological symbol of Italy. Those of us who place some reliance on astrological prophecies, looking back, may perhaps see in that comet a sign of the coming poet, who should, more than any other, influence the world of letters.

Ser Patracco took refuge in Arezzo, a city of Tuscany, and found on the so-called Garden Street a house, as the poet says, *haud sane*

ampla seu magnifica, sed qualis exsulem decuisset—" not indeed magnificent but suitable for an exile."

On Monday, July 20th, almost at the very hour when the Bianchi were making their last fruitless effort to regain the ascendancy, Francesco di Petracco was born. Here on the fifteenth of June, 1800, so nearly five exact centuries later, Napoleon, about to fight "Marengo's bloody battle," paused to grant, out of honour to Petrarca's memory, amnesty to its inhabitants.

Petrarca's life lies before us with remarkable clearness. Hundreds of letters give us an almost complete autobiography; but it has been charged against him that he was ashamed of his humble birth. He tells us little about his father's family. We know that his great-grandfather Ser Garzo, a man of considerable native wisdom, though uneducated, lived at Incisa a few miles from Florence and died at the age of 104 on his birth-day, in the very room where he had been born.

Of Petrarca's mother nothing is known and the Italian biographers are still struggling over the unsolved problem — whether her name was

Eletta, as seems to be indicated in his poem on her death, where he calls her *Electa Dei tam nomine quam re* — in that case making her a member of the well-known family of Cino Canigiani; or Nicolosa, daughter of Vanni Cini Sizoli, or whether she was Petracco's second wife or whether she was only sixteen when she gave birth to her famous son Francesco — Cecco as they called him. When he was six months old he went with his mother to Incisa and on the way as they crossed the Arno the horse of the servant who was carrying him stumbled and the baby was almost drowned.

At Incisa he spent the first six or seven years of his life and it is generally believed that he there acquired that perfect Tuscan speech which did him and his country such honour. The house where he dwelt is still shown, though badly ruined, and it bears an inscription to the effect that here the great poet first uttered the sweet sounds of his mother tongue. In 1312 Petracco assembled his family in Pisa but perhaps found it impossible to support them there. Like many other banished Florentines he hoped for better fortunes in France and accordingly took his family to Avignon.

The Pope, Clement V., was wandering about France — at Bordeaux, Lyons, Poitiers, Montpellier and Avignon, and in October, 1316, his successor, John XXII. established the Papal Court definitely at Avignon. Hither Petracco came in 1313 and a second time the son nearly lost his life in a shipwreck near Marseilles. Avignon, on the left bank of the Rhone, was a part of Provence and at this time Provence was the patrimony of King Robert of Naples: here the king had his court from 1318 until 1324.

The influences to which Petrarca must have submitted in this transplantation should not be disregarded. Although he detested Avignon itself with its narrow streets and vile odours, yet it was the home of Provençal song and must have given him his first leaning to poetry.

Little in the way of anecdote can be told of his childhood. An astrologer prophesied that he would win the favour of almost all the princes of his day, and this was fulfilled. Also he himself relates in one of his letters how his father showed him the picture of a double-bodied boy with twin heads, four hands and other curious prototypal anticipations of the Siamese twins, that had been born in Florence and lived two

or three weeks. He relates that his father gave his ear a sharp twitch that he might the better remember the marvel.

Expenses were high in Avignon and Petracco established his family at Carpentras, the capital of a little province where were mineral-springs and a quiet easy life. Here Petrarca lived four years and first enjoyed regular schooling at the hands of a scholar named Convennole or Convenevole who had a school there. This Convennole is believed by some to be the author of a portentous Latin poem of very mediocre value. He was in perpetual pecuniary difficulties and Petrarca's father often assisted him, but the man played him a very mean trick. In later years Petrarca himself came to his aid but his generosity was likewise most shabbily acquitted: he took two priceless manuscripts by Cicero and disposed of them. The books must have been destroyed, for no trace of them was ever found and thus were lost Cicero's *Libri de Gloria.*

Nevertheless, when Convennole died at Prato in 1340 or 1344 his fellow-citizens placed a poet's laurel crown on his tomb and Petrarca offered to write his epitaph.

The progress which Petrarca made in his studies was not remarkable and it is to be deeply regretted that a more liberally cultured scholar had not directed his training. A large part of Petrarca's works is in Latin but he never acquired a perfect style, such as Erasmus was able to wield. His Latin is mediæval: he himself discovered Cicero's Epistles but it was too late in life to modify his habits. Only his inherent genius enabled him to invest his Latin Letters with a perennial charm. Certainly his correspondence with Boccaccio is one of the most precious possessions of literature and it is one of the strange anomalies of life that it so long has remained a sealed book to English readers.

Petrarca's principal playmate and friend in Convennole's school was Guido Settimo who became Archbishop of Genoa, their friendship enduring more than fifty years. With the future archbishop the future poet made his first visit to the source of the Sorgue at Vaucluse or *Val chiusa*, the Shut-in Valley which he was to immortalise.

From Carpentras Petrarca was sent to the high school at Montpellier with the idea of

fitting him for his father's profession of the law. Here he spent four years but what he studied, or what his experiences were, is wholly unknown, or at least wholly a matter of conjecture mixed with imagination. One single anecdote of this time is preserved in Petrarca's correspondence. His father, thinking that general literature was too much drawing his son's attention away from the law, came unexpectedly to Montpellier, and making a thorough search for his books succeeded in finding them, carefully hidden though they had been, and flung them into the fire; moved, however, by his son's bitter tears he allowed him to rescue a copy of Vergil and Cicero's "Rhetoric."

From Montpellier he went to Bologna in 1323 with his brother Gherardo and here again he neglected the lectures on civic law to the advantage of what are called "the humanities." He also enjoyed the gaieties of a student's life and in his later days liked to recall them, especially as Bologna was at this time free from the disturbances that elsewhere were racking the Italian cities. The gates of the town were not closed till late at night, so secure felt the inhabitants, and the students had free course. With one of his

instructors Petrarca made a visit to Venice and here also he found the highest tide of prosperity. Soon both cities were doomed to vail their glories.

Among his many friends at Bologna was Giacomo Colonna who afterwards became Bishop of Lombes and gave him a home.

Petracco died in 1326, leaving his family in deep poverty, and the two sons returned to Avignon. Petrarca's only legacy was a manuscript of Cicero. With this, the profession of the law, none too enticing to him in any circumstances, seemed to be out of the question and as the Church offered greater inducements and especially as his friend Colonna was already on the road to high preferment, he decided to adopt this profession.

On the sixth of April, 1327, almost a year after his father's death and not long after the probable death of his mother, Petrarca saw in the church of Santa Chiara at Avignon for the first time the lady whom he celebrated under the name of Laura.

Who was she?

This question has been a puzzle for two centuries and seems to offer no chance of satisfactory solution. Opinions have varied in the widest way. Some scholars have argued that

the lady who inspired Petrarca's muse to such lofty flights of song was only a creature of his imagination; others, including Körting, give a certain amount of credence to the ingenious though somewhat sophisticated evidence of the clever Abbé de Sade, who elaborately argued that she was the daughter of Audibert de Noves and that she was born in 1307, that she was wedded to Hugh de Sade, the Abbé's ancestor, and bore him eleven children. A tomb at Avignon was opened in 1533 and in the coffin were found a medal and a sonnet. The sonnet was supposed to be Petrarca's though it was hardly worthy of his fame. On the medal were the initials "M. L. M. I." which were interpreted to mean *Madonna Laura morta iacit* — "Here lies the body of Madonna Laura."

This discovery was in accordance with an old tradition that Laura was a De Sade. The Abbé Costaing of Pusignan believed that she was Laura des Beaux, the daughter of the Seigneur de Vaucluse Adhemar de Cavaillon, on her mother's side descended from the house of Orange and that she lived with her relatives on her estates of Galas on the hills overlooking

the valley, and that she died not of the plague but of a consumption.

There is no phase of this famous passion that has not been made the subject of an essay or a poem.

Was she a widow or a maiden or the mother of a patriarchal family? Was Petrarca's description of her beauty based on the reality or is it an ideal figment of his imagination? Was she a heartless coquette as was believed by Macaulay? Would Petrarca have written a fuller and more perfect book of songs had she been perfectly complacent? So the learned Professor Zendrini argues. Was Laura an ambitious woman caring for nothing but her own praise and cold to Petrarca not by reason of virtue but because of her insensibility?

A hundred similar questions arise, and how idle they are! Only one of them we may answer and that in the poet's own words. Some one of his friends had evidently suggested that his complaints were imaginary and his Laura a being of air, as the name implies. He answered as follows:

"What dost thou mean by saying that I have invented the specious name of L'Aura as

if I wished to have something to talk about; that Laura is in reality nothing but a poetic fiction of my mind to which long and unremitting study proves that I have been aspiring; but that of this breathing Laura by whose form and beauty I seem to be a captive taken is all manufactured, verses fictitious, sighs simulated? Would that in this respect thou wert jesting in earnest! Would that it were *simulatio* and not *furor*. But believe me, no one without great effort can long use simulations but to struggle vainly to appear mad is the height of madness [*summa insania*]. Moreover while we may succeed in counterfeiting illness by our actions, we can not imitate pallor" — *tibi pallor tibi labor meus notus est.*

There are several passages in Petrarca's Latin writings where he makes it evident that Laura was an actual person. One is in the treatise concerning Scorn of this World in which he represents himself at the instigation of Truth, who appears to him in the form of a stately virgin, as holding a three days' conversation with his beloved instructor Saint Augustine. In the third dialogue Saint Augustine points out that Petrarca is held in the chains of two

passions which keep him from the true contemplation of life and of death: these are love and Glory. Augustine expresses his surprise that a man of Petrarca's talent should spend so large a part of his life in praise of an earthly love; and he predicts that the time will come when he will feel ashamed of himself and of this passion.

Petrarca replies that he has already, even during her life time, written a sonnet on her approaching death, having seen her once beautiful body exhausted by illnesses and frequent — *what?* Here is one of the mysteries; in the manuscript the word is, as usual, contracted and reads *ptbus*, which De Sade thinks stands for *partubus* — frequent child-bearing; while other manuscripts have the word spelled out: —*pertubationibus*. If she was the mother of eleven children, De Sade would seem to have reason on his side.

Petrarca goes on to assure Saint Augustine that in his Laura he had worshipped not the mortal body but the immortal soul and that even if she should die before he did, he would still love her virtue and her spirit. Saint Augustine objects that though she be perfect as a goddess, yet even that which is most beautiful

may be loved shamefully — *turpiter;* but Petrarca asseverates the purity of his passion and declares that in nothing but its impetuosity was he guilty before her: that she was the source and origin of all his glory; she had nurtured the feeble germ of virtue in his breast; she was the mirror of perfection and love has the power to transmute the lover into the standard of the object loved.

But Saint Augustine is not satisfied: he points out the danger of deception and thinks that the fact that he has loved his love so exclusively has caused him to scorn other human beings and human interests. Earthly love has turned Petrarca from the heavenly and into the straight road to death.

In the course of the conversation Saint Augustine brings Petrarca to confess that he has carried next his heart a portrait of his Laura and that even the laurel wreath is dear to him only because it brings the echo of her name. And when Petrarca asks Saint Augustine what he can do to be saved from such a dangerous passion, the Saint recommends change of scene.

"Alas," replies the poet, "in vain have I wandered West and North, far and long, even to

the shores of the Deep,and like the wounded stag carried my wound with me wherever I went." Augustine recommends Italy and here occurs his justly famed magnificent eulogium of that beauteous land. This leads naturally to the other chain — glory.

The second passage occurs in a poetic epistle to Giacomo Colonna, written probably in August 1337, two days after returning to Avignon after a long journey:

"Beloved beyond measure is a woman known by her virtue and her ancient lineage —*sanguine vetusto.* And my songs have given her glory and spread her fame far and wide. Ever does my heart turn back to her and with renewed pangs of love she overcomes me nor does it seem likely that she will ever renounce her conquest."

She had conquered him he says not by any arts of coquetry but by the rare beauty of her form. After enduring the chain for ten years, after wasting to a shadow and becoming another man, the fever of love so penetrating the very marrow of his bones that he could hardly drag one leg after another and he yearned for death, suddenly he determined to strike for freedom

and shake off the yoke. God gave him strength to win the battle; but even then the mistress of his heart pursued him as if he were an escaped slave.

"I fly," he says, "I wander over the whole circle of the world, I dare to plough the stormy billows of the Adriatic and the Tyrrhene seas and I entrust my life, rescued from the toils of love, to a tossing vessel: for why should I, wearied by the torments of the soul, and sick of life, fear a premature death? I turn my steps toward the West and behold the lofty summits of the Pyrenees from my couch in the sunny grass. I behold the ocean from where the weary God of Day, after his long journey, dips his chariot of fire in the Hesperian flood and where looking up to Atlas turned to stone at sight of Medusa, he causes the steep mountain precipices to throw long shadows, and hides the moors with hastening shades of night. Hence I turn to the North and Boreas, and, lonely, wander through those lands that are filled with the harsh accents of barbarians' tongues, where the gloomy waves of the British sea splash with changeful foam the shores of half-known coasts and where the icy soil denies obedience to the

friendly plough and keeps the vine-stock alien to the hills. Little by little as I journeyed, the billows of my passion grew calm: pain, wrath and fear began to vanish; now and then peaceful slumber closed my eyelids moist with tears, and an unaccustomed smile played over my face; and already in my recollection with less of threat and less of authority arose the image of my deserted love."

Alas, he goes on, he was deceived; he thought he might disregard the sting of passion; the wound was not healed, the anguish was not allayed. He returned, but no sooner was he within the walls of the beloved city than his breast was again laden with the burden of cares. And then follows that superb description not dimmed even in the Latin in which it is couched:

"The sailor fears not with such terror the reefs as he sails through the night, as I now fear my love's face and her heart-stirring words, her head crowned with golden tresses and her snowy neck encircled with a chain and her eyes dealing sweet death."

Even in the secluded vale of Vaucluse he finds no relief: Useless to bewail the vanished years. Waking he sees her and at night her

image seems to come through the triple-locked doors of his chamber at midnight and claim him as her slave. Then before the morning paints with crimson the eastern sky, he arises and leaves the house and wanders over mountain and through forest, ever on the watch to see if she is not there.

"Oft," he says, "when I think I am alone in the pathless woods, the bushes waving in the breeze present her figure and I see her face in the bole of the lonely oak; her image rises from the waters of the spring; I seem to see her in the clouds, in the empty air and even in the adamantine stone."

To the celebration of this love he consecrates 291 sonnets, twenty-four *canzoni*, nine *sestini*, seven *ballata* and four madrigals, besides the semi-epic poem written in *terza rima* like the "Divina Commedia." In these sonnets — which are curious in this respect that they are not a sequence, they mark no progression: they are like a placid lake, not a river — Petrarca celebrates his love in every way. Every little event inspires a poem. Once he sees her about to cross a stream and the removal of her white shoes and red stockings leads to a sonnet. Her

beauty is ever the thought in his mind: both in Italian and Latin he tells us:

Una donna più bella che 'l sole,
forman parem non ulla videbunt saecula —

"A woman lovelier than the sun, whose form no century will ever see equalled."

And again of her gait and voice:

non era l'andar suo cosa mortale,
ma d'angelica forma e le parole
sonavan altro che pur voce umana —

"Her gait was not a mortal thing but of an angelic form and her words sounded different from any human voice:"

cuius nec vox nec oculorum vigor
nec incessus hominem repraesentat.

A few of the lovely passages — which alas! even in a paraphrase must lose much of their charm— must furnish a hint of the richness of this collection of poems which Guiseppe Jacopo Ferrazzi calls the bible of poets and which is by most critics considered "the most perfect monument of love-poetry among modern nations."

Her name, he says in the fifth sonnet, which is devoted to an elaborate pun upon it — Laure-ta and Lau-re — was written on his heart by love. He sends her some fruit in spring and the thought that the sun has ripened it causes

him to call her "a sun among women" — *tra le donne un sole* — which shedding the rays of her bright eyes upon him wakes into life the thoughts, acts and words of love. But he concludes sadly that though spring may shine on earth again there will never be spring again for him. Most beautiful is the beginning of the second *canzone*

Verdi panni, sanguini, oscuri o persi —

excellently translated by Miss Louise Winslow Kidder:

> Green robes, blood-coloured, dark or reddish black
> Or golden hair in shining tresses heaped,
> Ne'er clothed a woman beautiful as she
> Who robs me of my will, and with herself
> Allures me from the path of liberty,
> So that no other servitude less grave
> Do I endure.

In this *canzone* there are eight stanzas of seven lines each and a sort of coda of two lines, there being only seven rhymes in the whole poem. In the sestine are no rhymes, but each stanza of six lines has the same word endings. In the third *canzone* he speaks of her beautiful soft eyes which carry the keys to his sweet thoughts:

Que' begli occhi soavi
Che portaron le chiavi
De' miei dolci pensier.

And further on he speaks of the golden tresses

which should make the sun full of deep envy and her beautiful calm look — *bel guardo sereno* — where the rays of Love are so warm, and still recalling her graces, her white delicate hands and lovely arms —

le man bianchi sottili
e le braccia gentili.

All very well translated by Macgregor:

The soft hands, snowy charm,
The finely rounded arm,
The winning way, by turns, that quiet scorn.

He renders the lines

I dolci sdegni alteramente umili
e 'l bel giovenil petto
torre d'alto intelletto

Chaste anger, proud humility adorn
The fair young breast that shrined
Intellect pure and high.

Wotton translates the lines:

L'oro e le perle e i fior vermigli e i bianchi
Che 'l verno devria far languidi e secchi:

Those golden tresses, teeth of pearly white,
Those cheeks' fair roses blooming to decay.

But it very well illustrates the danger one runs in reading translations: the gold and pearls and red and white flowers are the adornments which Laura wears and which are reflected in the mirror against which he complains because in

seeing herself reflected there she cares more for herself than for him.

Particularly beautiful is the sonnet in which he blesses all the circumstances of his passion:

Benedetto sia 'l giorno, e 'l mese e 'l anno
E la stagione e 'l tempo e l 'ora e 'l punto
E 'l bel paese e 'l loco ov' io fui giunto
Da duo begli occhi.

This translated literally reads:

"Blest be the day and the month and the year and the season and the time and the hour and the instant and the fair country and the place where I was captured by two lovely eyes that enchained me fast." And the sonnet proceeds: "And blest be the first sweet inquietude [*affanno*] that I felt at being joined with love, and the bow and arrows whereby I was wounded and the wounds that came into my heart. Blest be the voices which calling out the name of my lady, I scattered; and the sighs and the desire; and blest be all the writings whereby I won my fame and my thought which is wholly of her, so that no other has a share in it."

After eleven years of *perduti giorni*, since that "fierce passion's strong entanglement" (as Dacre translates the line) he calls upon the

Father of Heaven to vouchsafe unto him power to turn to a different life and to finer achievements

ad altra vita ed a più belle imprese.

But still the charm holds: even if he would forget her the sight of the green laurel-tree brings her so vividly before him that amid the oaks and pines on the shore of the Tuscan sea where the waves broken by the winds complain, he falls as it were dead; even after fourteen years have passed he still sings her golden locks flowing in mazy ringlets to the breeze — *capelli d'oro a l'aura sparsi.*

Leigh Hunt has a good translation of the *canzone* to the Fountain of Vaucluse beginning: *Chiare, fresche e dolci acque* —

Clear, fresh and dulcet streams
Which the fair shape who seems
To me sole woman haunted at noon-tide.
Fair bough, so gently fit
(I sigh to think of it)
Which lent a pillar to her lovely side
And turf and flowers bright-eyed
O'er which her folded gown
Flowed like an angel's down,
Give ear, give ear with one consenting
To my last words, my last and my lamenting.

Of Petrarca's later life there are a thousand fascinating details to be found in his letters:

his travels, friendships, with all the great men of his day, his relations with popes and prelates, princes and emperors, his clever intrigues to obtain the poet's laurel crown, his studies, his efforts to collect the first private library of modern times, his residences, as for instance in the Magician's house at Selva Piana, or at Venice at the house of Arrigo Molin, from one of the turrets of which he used to watch the ships, or again on the beautiful Euganean Hills.

Nor must we forget his cat which, as Tasoni says, still unburied — *un' insepolta gatta* — "conquers in glory the tombs of haughty kings." A whole chapter should be devoted to his beautiful friendship with Boccaccio and how one of his last works was to translate into Latin the story of the Patient Griselda which Chaucer put into verse.

A few cardinal dates will serve on which to hang the more important events of the latter half of his life: In 1339 he began his Latin poem "Africa," the hero of which was Scipio: it waited more than half a millennium to be published. The next two years he was busy with his growing glory and waiting to be crowned at the Capitol.

After several years' residence at Parma he

was made canon and in 1348 while residing at Verona came the sad news of Laura's death. Henceforth his sonnets, though retrospective and often inspired by memory of her beauty become an ascending scale until in the "Trionfi" they rival the more spiritualised poems of Dante, Laura being personified as Chastity triumphant.

In 1350 he was appointed archdeacon of Parma and the following year the Florentines decreed the restoration of his property, but when he refused to live there they confiscated it again. In 1360 he was sent as an ambassador to King Jean of France and then settled in Venice, where he lived another decade and then retired to Arqua among the Euganean Hills, where, in 1374, on the eighteenth of July, he was found dead at his table. A magnificent funeral was decreed in his honour as became so great an ornament to Italy. In 1873 his tomb was opened. His skull and bones were at first intact but on exposure to the air speedily fell to dust.

This great man becomes even greater on close study: he is chiefly known as the author of love-poems which in a dissolute age are absolutely pure and in such perfect Italian that the taste of the most refined and exacting would

change scarcely a word. Although these graceful *lavorietti* composed of equal parts of serenity, brightness of touch and absolute perfection of imagery, are so spontaneous in Italian and so impossible to translate into English — wilting (as has been well said by an Italian scholar) when transferred into alien soil — yet all poets who know Italian have tried their hand at them. The latest attempt, by a California lady who published her version* in London, is sheer paraphrase: the simplicity and directness of the original appear in an extraordinarily imaginative overlaying of filagree and arabesque. A word or a hint is enlarged to an elaborate comparison; a thousand poetic images and conceits which Petrarca never dreamed of are introduced, and yet the work has been widely heralded as a masterpiece of translation. It was certainly inspired by Petrarca, but if one compares the version with the original, the enormous gulf between them will become at once apparent.

They were turned into Polish by Ian Grotkowski as early as 1465. Spanish, German and French poets — all have drunk at the fountain of this Parnassus. In 1520 there was a Petrarca

* "Madonna Laura." Agnes Tobin, 1907.

Academy at Venice. Ioost van Vondel, the greatest of the classic Dutch poets and the master of Milton, made a pilgrimage to Arqua and set Petrarca above all other poets. Boccaccio in 1374 two hundred years earlier had predicted that Arqua, a village scarcely known even in Padua, would rise famous in the whole world: men in days to come would make pilgrimages to it. His prediction was amply verified.

There are at least two score commentaries on Petrarca's Italian poems which he himself regretted and repented having written. According to Crescenbini there were more than six hundred sonnetteers in the sixteenth century all imitating Petrarca: no less than twelve at once in Venice. Marco Foscarini prepared for the press the *Rime* of sixty Venetian gentlemen, all disciples of Laura's lover.

On the fifth centenary of his birth, prizes being offered, more than six hundred responses in French and Provençal were submitted.

But he was not merely a poet, he was also great as an orator, as a scholar, as a philosopher. The more we study his career the more we must marvel at its richness in accomplishment. Ugo Foscolo calls him the restorer of letters. He was the promoter of classic literature. "For

us and for all Europe," says Carducci, "Petrarca was above all the recreator of glorious antiquity and the leader who through the desert of the Middle Ages freed our people from the slavery of barbarous peoples."

Professor Domenico Berti calls him at once poet, historian, philosopher, scholar and cultivator of the fine arts and speaks of his fine, exquisite, full, robust genius and his noble soul.

He was also the prophet of United Italy. When Cola di Rienzi engaged in his great but futile struggle to restore to Rome her ancient liberty Petrarca actively sympathised with him and wrote to him one of his noblest *canzoni* beginning

Spirto gentil che quelli membra reggi,

and that which begins "*Italia mia*" praised by all critics and commentators and called the Marseillaise of Italy, as fresh and animated and full of sparkling enthusiasm to-day as if written only yesterday. It may be read in Lady Dacre's spirited version. No wonder the Austrian authorities, when they were making their desperate efforts to keep Italy dismembered and enslaved, forbade its use in the gymnasia, for it well might kindle generous souls to patriotic hatred of tyranny.

IV

BOCCACCIO AND THE NOVELLA

I.

NOTHING can be more unsatisfactory as a means of conversation than an afternoon tea as it is usually disposed. Interruption is the certain concomitant of every attempt to carry on any serious train of thought. One's best anecdote is broken off just as the point begins to appear; the fuse of one's liveliest epigram is nipped in the bud before it has an opportunity to explode. The unnatural sound of high-pitched voices commingling may indeed remind the observer of nature — for there is a curious and subtle relationship between this most artificial and hot-house product of civilisation and that wild unchained creature of life — a mountain-brook. As you stand at the door of a modern drawing-room, you hear gurgles and musical intonations: shut your eyes and you may transport yourself in imagination to the mossy bank of your favourite stream. You can see the foamy little cascades and the bell-

like voices of the waters as they hurry down over glittering stones and fallen logs. Or stand by that same brook and shut your eyes and you can imagine yourself in the full swing of a well-attended reception. But however much talk there may be at such a function there is no conversation. That fine art has not died, but it is rare to meet with it in these hurried days. Perhaps enjoyment may be just as great, but it is of a different kind. It is of a piece with predigested foods and predigested journals and predigested "libraries of literature."

The Italians of the fourteenth century had a more dignified mode of society entertainment. The ladies and gentlemen that gathered in the *salon* of the court or in the shady garden organised what they called *una lieta brigata* — a happy jolly, merry, jocund band — and appointed a captain or it might be, a queen who should give them a theme and call upon one after another of the company to illustrate it with stories. Such themes as "The magnanimity of princes," "Concerning those that have been fortunate in love," "Sudden changes from prosperity to misfortune," "The guiles that women have practised on their husbands" and the like were common.

This was the origin of the so-called *novella*. Symonds says:

"The *novella* is invariably brief and sketchy. It does not aim at presenting a detailed picture of human life within certain artistically chosen limitations, but confines itself to a striking situation or tells an anecdote illustrative of some moral quality."

He goes on to show how the fact that these *novelle* were either read aloud or improvised on the spur of the occasion "determined the length and ruled the mechanism" of them. "It was impossible," he says, "within the short space of a spoken tale to attempt any minute analysis of character or to weave the meshes of a complicated plot. The narrator went straight to his object, which was to arrest the attention, gratify the sensual instincts or stir the tender emotions of his audience by some fantastic, extraordinary, voluptuous, comic or pathetic incident. He sketches his personages with a few swift touches, set forth with pungent brevity and expends his force upon the painting of their central motive."

All of this is set forth with much care in the second chapter of his "Renaissance in Italy,"

where he explains further that the sole object of the *novella* was entertainment and where he illustrates how its success was obtained in new strange incidents, in obscenity veiled or repulsively naked, in gross or graceful jests, in practical jokes and delicate pathos, often by "elaborate rhetorical development of the main emotions, placing carefully studied speeches in the mouth of heroine or hero and using every artifice for appealing directly to the feelings of his hearers."

Human nature seems not to have changed since the first known calendar was computed, that is to say in July 4241 B. C. The coarse and animal, which is to a certain extent inseparable from man as a featherless biped, still has its more or less powerful attraction. It is found in all literatures and has to be reckoned with. The tales of the Thousand and One Nights have to be expurgated for ordinary reading and there are few of the *Cento Novelle* that would do now to present to a mixed company. In studying any past literature we must expect shocks to our conventionalities. Our great-grandmothers were brought up on "The Pleasing Instructor," which admitted into its sup-

posedly educational pages several stories that Mr. Comstock would be likely to confiscate. We are told that Queen Elizabeth's conversation was garnished with very round oaths and glided over topics that would make her presence in a modern drawing-room a scandal and reproach. It is curious, however, that while the English drama and novel of the two centuries before our own era are quite too frank in speech, our own laxity of spectacular performance would have been regarded with horror by our worthy ancestors.

Human nature remains the same though conventionalities change. And when we remember the expurgations required in Dean Swift and the Reverend Laurence Sterne, it may not seem so strange to us to find Italian bishops in the fourteenth century writing for the daughters of princes *novelle* so salacious that not even the subjects may be mentioned, or to read at the beginning of these filthy records of monstrous vice a prayer such as the following which occurs at the beginning of one of Lasca's least presentable *novelle:*

"Before a beginning is made of the story-telling of this evening I turn to Thee, *Dio ottimo*

e grandissimo, who alone knowest all things and art all powerful, beseeching Thee with humble devotion and from my heart, that by Thy infinite goodness and mercy Thou wilt grant to me and to all the others that shall follow me in speaking as much of Thine aid and of Thy grace that my tongue and theirs shall say nothing that shall not redound to Thy praise and their consolation."

Mixed companies of ladies and gentlemen, married and single, listened without a blush to inuendo and *double entendre*, to the frankest exposition of unmentionable things. And, again, it was in accordance with this queer quality of convention that boys and girls used to be and probably still are in many pious families set to reading the whole Bible through in course, though perhaps fortunately they do not always grasp the intense meaning of some of Saint Paul's savage jests or the subtleties of the Old Testament which are rendered in such veiled language that their full meaning is hidden from the exoteric reader.

It must not be supposed that the Italian *novellieri* always invented their stories. The genealogy of popular fiction is as much a science as heraldry. Just as all human beings have a

certain set of features: a nose hawk-like or straight or retroussé, between two eyes of some colour, above a mouth large, small or medium and established at some angle upon a head crowned with red, black, brown or yellow hair, or like Chaucer's monk whose "heed was balled and schon like eny glasse," so there are features common to all stories, whether they be traced to Arabian, Indian, Scandinavian, Slavonic or British sources. There are great families of legends, such as those that cluster about the person of King Arthur and his Table Round, or those derived from the equally mythical Charlemagne, or that have come down to us from the indented shores of Hellas, or those that arose in what the Germans poetically call the Morning-land.

Many a story that now does service in the nursery has a long and regal ancestry, perhaps finding its origin in a sun-myth told and believed in the misty ages thousands of years before Moses. Often the character of the nation amongst which such stories had their birth is plainly stamped upon them. How many of the Arabian Nights stories hint at the despotic government that crushed the people! See how the

poetic and lofty nature of the Greeks is betrayed in their stories of Jason and Perseus and Odysseus! Notice the masterful qualities of the Romans in their popular tales, how feudal chivalry decked the legends of Europe with details of fire-breathing dragons and innocent maidens rescued by gallant knights! All these sources seem to contribute to the Nile stream from which these novelists so plenteously drew.

One single genealogical tree will perhaps give some idea of the distribution of these folk-stories. It is taken from a chart in Dr Landau's "Die Quellen des Dekameron."

Somewhere between 200 B. C. and 600 A. D. there was composed in the Sanskrit tongue a work probably consisting of thirteen books or parts. The original title is lost and of the work itself only five chapters, under the title "Kalila we Dimna" or "Panchatantra," are known. The first is called "The Gentle Art of Making Enemies"; the second "The Acquisition of Friends"; the third "The War between the Cranes and the Owls"; the fourth, "Loss of Former Possessions", and the fifth, "Action without Careful Investigation."

The original work was written by Buddhists,

but when Buddhism was expelled from India all traces of Buddhistic influences were eliminated. The Brahman revision remained as one of the treasures of India for hundreds of years, till it was discovered and published in Germany in 1848 and translated into German by Benfly, That is a direct short-cut from ancient times to ours. But meantime the stream had been coming in a more round about fashion.

The original work did not immediately perish. About 600 A. D. the King of Persia, Khosru Nu-shir-wan, caused his Court Physician Berzujah to translate it into the polite language, the Pahlavi. This version, like the original, is supposed to have perished; but a translation of it into Syrian was made at some time unknown and was published with a German translation under the title "Kalilag und Damnag," in 1876. It was so called from the names of the two jackals—Karataka and Damanaka—that play a leading part in the story.

An Arab, by the name of Abd-allah ibn al Mokaffa, who died in 762, after becoming a convert to Islamism, translated the Persian version into Arabic at the instigation of the Khalif Al-Mansor. It is said to be less literal,

as the translator was influenced by his religious beliefs; but the manuscripts are believed to be more or less incorrect. The same Pahlavi, or Persian, version was used about a hundred years later by the son of the Khalif Mamun, and this again was translated back into Persian by Kiaja Belgemi at the command of the ruler of Khorasan, Nasr ben Ahmed, and this one again served as a basis for a poetical version by Rudegi, in the tenth century.

There are a number of other Arabic translations; and when we remember the connection that came about between the East and the West by means of the Crusades, and, moreover, the splendid civilisation that characterised Sicily and Spain under Saracenic rule, it will not surprise us to know how widely this Oriental wisdom and anecdote was spread through the world.

From one Arabic version a Hebrew one was made by the Rabbi Joel, supposedly before the middle of the thirteenth century; from the Hebrew Giovanni of Capua in the middle of the thirteenth century made the Latin translation printed in 1480 under the title *Directorium humanæ vitæ;* from this at second or third or

even fourth hand are derived German, Danish, Spanish, Italian, Bohemian, French and English versions. From the Greek translation, entitled "Stephanites kai Ichnalites," which dates from the eleventh century and is believed to be the work of a Greek physician, Symeon Seth, came two more Latin versions, one in Germany, the other in Rome, an old Slav version, and one in Italian.

There are other versions, dozens of them, including a Spanish translation which goes back to the thirteenth century: they are found in Turkish and Hindustani—such was the vogue of the so-called Fables of Bidpah or Pilpai.* There is no known Italian version before 1548: only one of the anecdotes of the Panchatantra appears in Boccaccio, though there are three others that bear certain resemblances, and it is thought that these must have come to him by oral tradition.

Another work of Oriental origin which was very widely spread by means of translations and leaking off into folk-stories was the "Book of the

* This is not a proper name but derives from an Arabic perversion of the Sanskrit *vidya-pati*, or master of sciences, which was applied to the Brahman philosopher or *pandit* who is fabled to have brought back to the paths of virture King Dabshelim, the ruler of the Panjab after the fall of Alexander's governor in the third century, B. C.

Seven Wise Men," — a work which in popularity and wide-reaching influence is thought to excel anything that has come down to us from antiquity. Under the various titles: "The History of the Forty Viziers" in Turkish, "Syntipas" in Greek; "Sandabar" in Hebrew, "Sindibad Nameh," in Persian, "Sindbar" in Syrian, "Sindban or the Seven Mages," "The History of the King, his Son, and the Seven Viziers" in other translations, is found the same general collection of tales and the same plot.

In this a king has a son, by a deceased wife, educated away from the court. Just as the young prince is about to return to his father he is warned by his tutor that, according to the stars, he will run great danger and must for a time, say seven days, pretend that he is deaf and dumb. He follows his tutor's advice and various attempts are made to cure him of his supposed affliction. The Queen, his step-mother, falls in love with him, but when she fails, like Potiphar's wife in the story of Joseph — also a favorite story in the East — to draw him from the path of virtue, she accuses him to the king, who condemns him to death. Then appear the prince's instructor and his seven other

teachers—the seven Wise Men—who, by their entertaining tales, manage to postpone the execution till the astrological time is fulfilled and then the prince, breaking his silence, declares his innocence and the wicked queen, being convicted of her own guilt, is punished.

A similar outline is found in the great collection of the Thousand Nights and the One Night, which, by the way, includes a variant of the story of the Seven Wise Men.

Under the title "Historia Septem Sapientium Romæ" it was circulated in many editions in the Middle Ages and was early translated into Italian, both prose and poetic, with dozens of different names for the Sages, with different scenes of action: China, Persia, India, Constantinople, Sicily, Rome.

The eighth Novel of the second Day of the Decameron is a partial variation of this story, but Boccaccio also makes use of several of the stories told by the Wise Men.

The "Sukasaptati," or "Seventy Stories of a Parrot," is another collection of Oriental origin, where a parrot, in order to save his mistress from punishment in consequence of the visits of her lover during her husband's absence, tells this

string of stories. Echoes of these are found in Chaucer as well as in Boccaccio. Who first began to make collections of stories for the amusement of the Italians it is impossible to determine. There must have been many that were never committed to writing. The representative collection dating from the thirteenth or fourteenth century is entitled, *Libro di Novelle e di bel parlar gentile: cento novelle antiche*, or summed up in one word, *Il Novellino*.

Professor D'Ancona argues that this collection was the work of one author who, he believes, was a Florentine merchant, but the tradition attributing it to several authors and collectors seems to be still well grounded and sustained. There is no manuscript of them in existence and no author rises from the tomb to claim them as his. Some of them have been ascribed to Dante, others to Brunetto Latini, others to Francesco Barberini. They seem to belong to different periods. The first edition that bore the title of "The Hundred Ancient Novels" was published in Bologna in 1525. It has been a moot question whether an undated copy which was sold some years ago for £60 was an example of this edition. It has been frequently

printed since, and the best edition is that of Biagi of 1880.

These novels throw a curious light on the men and women and scholarship of the Italians of the fourteenth century. Most of them are cast in Italy, though in some the scenes are laid in other parts of Europe, in the Orient, and the semi-mythical realms of King Arthur and Miliardus.

Antiquity plays a solemn part: Aristotle, Cato, Diogenes, Seneca, King Priam and other celebrities are introduced. In the fifty-eighth Socrates appears as a Roman senator and is shown in consultation with an embassy from the Greek Sultan. The same curious disregard of historical accuracy is found in the "Gesta Romanorum." As in mediæval paintings Bible characters are represented as dressed in the costume of the painter's epoch, so in these stories all sorts of delightful anachronisms occur. Greeks and Romans and Orientals are alike seen delineated in the fashion of feudal knights. Many of them are so simple and unsophisticated and childlike that they are as delightful as a picture by Botticelli. Such for instance is the story of the prince brought up in

absolute seclusion and ignorance of the world, who is so charmed with the demons. He had heard of demons but his guardian's description of the inhabitants of the Pit did not seem to tally with the beings that he saw so gaily dressed in the street.

Boccaccio has the same idea in the introduction to the Fourth Day. He tells of a fellow-citizen named Felippo Balducci, gifted with wealth and other good things, who, inconsolable on the death of his *buona donna*, took his only son and went with him to Monte Asinajo — the Mountain of Pure Air* — to serve God and bring the boy up to a similar pursuit. This *valente uomo* used sometimes to go down to Florence and when his son was eighteen and he himself grown old the youth begged his father to take him to the city. After some cavil the old man accedes to his request.

Here the youth, seeing the palaces, the mansions, the churches, and all the other things of which the whole city was so full, began to marvel and many times asked his father what they were and what they were called. The father told

*The word *Asinajo* signifies an ass-driver, but is explained as a perversion of *Asanaria*, that is, *sana aria;* rather far-fetched it must be confessed.

him and when he heard he was satisfied and began to ask about something else. And as thus the son was asking and the father was replying, by chance they met a *brigata* of handsome young ladies beautifully dressed who were returning from a wedding festival. And when the young man saw them he demanded of his father what manner of thing they were. And the father replied:

"My son, fix your eyes upon the ground; look not upon them; they are evil things."

Then the son said: "But father, what are they called?"

The father not wishing to call them by their real names, that is, women, said, "They are called *papere* — green geese."

And wonderful to relate, he who had never seen one before, not caring now for the palaces or the oxen or the horses or the asses or the monkeys or anything that he had seen, suddenly said: "My father, I beg you to give me one of those green geese."

"*Oimè* — alas! my son," said the father, "hush, they are evil — *mala cosa!*"

Whereupon the son asked, saying: "Are evil things made?"

"Yes," replied the father, and the lad rejoined: "I don't know what you mean nor why they are *mala cosa;* as for me, I never saw anything so beautiful or so delightful, as they are. They are more beautiful than the painted lambs that you have sometimes showed me. Ah! If you have any love for me, do let us take home with us one of those green goslings and I will feed it" — *io le darò beccare.*

And the father replied: "I will not; you do not know what they put into their beaks." And he repented that he had brought his son to Florence.

In the *Novellino* a maiden educated in a convent, knowing nothing of the outside world sees a goat climbing on the wall and asks a nun what it is. "One of the women of the world," she replies. "When they grow old they have a beard and horns." And the maiden is delighted to have learned this much of the great world.

II

The author or authors of the *Novellino* are hidden behind the veil of anonymity; but not far distant from them in time stands a figure

which is the type and representative of the gay, pleasure-loving, pleasure-conferring *novelliero* of the Renascence. Giovanni Boccaccio — John Big-mouth — was born in the year 1313. His father, Boccaccio di Chellino, of a plebeian family of Certalda, a castello of the Val D'Elsa was a merchant whose business apparently kept him vibrating between Florence and Paris. It is known that he was in Paris from 1310 until the year of his son's birth. There is a legend to the effect that he was engaged in some service under the King of France, Philip the Fair, and that from his intimate relations with a young lady of high rank, possibly a princess of the blood, was born the illegitimate son. Körting and some of the Italian biographers of Boccaccio argue with considerable ingenuity that, as he certainly inherited property from his father and enjoyed the right of citizenship in Florence and held public office, he must have been a legitimate son and hence they do not hesitate to assert that Boccaccio di Chellino married a French lady, brought her to Florence and there the boy was born.

Vencenzo Crescini combats this opinion and to support his views, which coincide with the

legend, he adduces three of Boccaccio's *novelle*, in which he finds autobiographical data veiled under the disguise of fiction and anagram. According to him Boccaccio's mother was a Parisian lady, her name being Jeanne, the anagram of which is Giannai. Boccaccio's father abandoned the mother of his son and afterward in Florence took to wife Margherita di Gian Donato de' Martoli, whose name appears in one of the *novelle* as Gharemita.

In the same way, reading between the lines, it seems probable that his presence in the paternal house was not grateful to the new Signora Boccaccio and that he was therefore brought up away from his home. His father destined him for his own vocation and sent him to Naples, probably when he was about sixteen years old.

He was evidently a boy of precocious intellect and in Naples there was everything to stimulate his ambition. Under the patronage and protection of King Roberto, who under Petrarca's instruction had learned to like poetry, bards and learned men found their works and studies liberally rewarded. Villani, Boccaccio's earliest biographer tells a pretty story of the youth: how he stood at the entrance of the tomb of Vergil at

Posilipo and looking forth on one of the most beautiful prospects in the whole wide world — the sea lying at his feet like a vast living sapphire set with diamonds, the vine-clad mountains and the villa-dotted shores — then and there vowed to devote himself to Poesy.

In his leisure moments he studied. Paolo Perugino, King Robert's learned librarian, gave him his first lessons in that classic mythology which he introduces into his works with such brilliant effect. It is known that he learned eagerly about the motions of the heavenly bodies from the famous Genoese astronomer Andalone del Negro, of whom he speaks with the greatest reverence in his later works. In comparison with such lofty themes what a dry and tedious drudgery was the study of mercantile law — the *Decretale* — and how low and degrading the details of trade! He begged his grudging father to allow him to abandon the profession which he so thoroughly detested. He studied canonical law and other subjects then regarded as essential to a liberal education but undoubtedly the Latin poets offered more attractions to him than the dryer books of the Jurists. The letters that he wrote at this time are couched

in very barbarous Latin and are sprinkled with Greek terms just as a boy nowadays learning French or German likes to show off his new attainment by introducing it at every opportunity.

Probably Boccaccio then spent most of his young-manhood at Naples: whether he had the advantage of travel, as Villani asserts, is problematical, but we have Boccaccio's own somewhat allegorical description of the most important episode of his life. Just as Dante worshipped Beatrice, just as Petrarca made Laura the ideal of his life, so Boccaccio found his inspiration in a love that is hardly less celebrated.

On the Saturday preceding Easter, 1338, in the church of San Lorenzo, Boccaccio saw for the first time Madonna Maria, the natural daughter of King Roberto. She was married to a personage of high rank attached to her father's court. She was a vision of radiant beauty: *bellissima nell' aspetto, graziosa e leggiadra e di verdi vestimenti vestita, e ornata secondo che la sua età e l'antico costume della città richiedono.* This lady whom he so beautifully describes in her beauty and grace, in her green gown as the fashion of the city prescribed,

kindled in Boccaccio's heart the flames of love, and he celebrated his passion for her under the name of Fiametta.

At first she welcomed the adoration of the handsome young poet, who, like herself, had to bear the bar sinister of illegitimate birth — a disgrace perhaps, but not so seriously regarded in those days of decaying feudal customs, especially where the one side or the other had royal blood. She shared the common conception that "a poet's worship is each woman's secret goal."

But to the joyous days of reciprocated passion succeeded, as usual in such cases, the dark hours when it begins to dawn on the poet that he is only a toy of the beautiful woman for whom he would be willing to die.

He, then, like Petrarca, though even more bitterly — because he had once tasted the enchanted Circean cup — bewails his wasted days and his love-lorn case: but not in the form of a *canzoniero*. Boccaccio, to be sure, wrote poetry, but he is not remembered as a poet, rather as a story-teller. Here and there in the course of these multitudinous tales we may see the traces of his once reciprocated but afterwards unrequited devotion.

Through the influence of Fiametta he first tried his hand at the art which he so perfected. One time, while the sun of favour was shining upon him, he and Fiametta were together at a *brigata* and when the conversation turned upon the famous old French romance of Florio and Blanchefleur, the fair lady bade her lover tell the story in the Italian tongue. Instead of the *piccolo libretto* which she expected he expanded it into a long volume. Before it was finished he had left Napoli and was at his father's house at either Florence or Certaldà.

As we have remarked before, the autobiography of his youth is to be discovered in the various episodes of this first *novello*. It bears the name of *Il Filocolo* and in an affected and prolix style relates how Lelio, a noble Roman of the early Christian times, was with his wife Giulia travelling to San Giacomo in Galicia when, being attacked by Felice, King of Spain, he was slain. Giulia fell into the hand of the Pagans but was kindly received by the queen. The queen bears a son named Florio and on the same day to the captive woman is born a beautiful daughter to whom is given the romantic name of Biancofiore, or White Flower. The two

children are brought up together at Marmorina and of course learn to love each other. When the king learns of their passion he sends his son to study at Montario. These are the high-flown words with which the young prince takes his leave, sugaring the bitterness of their separation: "The transparency [*chiarità*] of thy visage surpasses the light of Apollo, nor can the *bellezza* of Venus equal thine. And the sweetness of thy voice would do better things than the lyre of the Thracian or the Theban Amphion. Wherefore the lofty Emperor of Rome, castigator of the world, would be thy fittest consort or rather, in my opinion, if 't were possible for Juno to die, none would be more suitable to be the consort of highest Jove."

As the separation proves unavailing the girl is charged with plotting to poison the king. She is condemned to be burned at the stake but the gallant young lover rescues her just in time. She is then sold as a slave to some merchants who carry her off to Alexandria and dispose of her to the admiral of that noble city. Florio is informed that his White Flower is dead. Just as he is on the point of shuffling off this mortal coil in the dignified and leisurely way charac-

teristic of the ancients so as to join her in the world of ghosts his mother tells him the truth, and with a sigh of relief at being spared an unpleasant duty he hastens off with renewed ardour under the assumed name of Filocolo, which Boccaccio — unwittingly betraying his small knowledge of Greek — assures his readers comes from two Greek words *philos*, love, and *kolos*, fatigue — whereby he means simply that he would never rest till he should find his lost love.

After various adventures he reaches Alexandria and makes his way to the tower where Biancofiore is confined. Just as they are about to escape, happy at being reunited, they are caught again and condemned to be burned to death. But a magic ring defends them from the flames. Venus herself descends to liberate them. Mars also takes their part and by putting himself at the head of the young man's followers routs their enemies. Finally the admiral of Alexandria recognizes in Florio, alias Filocolo his own nephew, and unites him to his beloved Biancofiore. On their way home they find in Rome the beautiful bride's most noble relatives. Under the able instruction of Sant'

Ilario Florio becomes a convert to Christianity and returning to Marmorina causes his parents also to be baptised.

The principal charm of the work consists in the epidodes. What to us mean such euphuisms as to speak of morning as the getting up of the Goddess Aurora or to speak of evening as the time when the horses of Phoebus bathe in the waves of the ocean? These periphrases, as one may easily see, are only the exaggerations of the peculiar style at first affected by Dante and based on the poetry of Vergil and Ovid. They are the natural effects of a classical education not as yet accommodating itself to the genius of a man's own vernacular and time.

Florio on his way to Alexandria is driven by a tempest to Naples and there, or at least just outside the city, he meets — by a delightful anachronism — a *lieta brigata*, with the beautiful Fiametta as the lady of honour. He is received most graciously and made umpire to decide thirteen subtle questions of love. These are excellent samples of the absurd subtleties that exercised those gay and fashionable ladies and cavaliers:

A girl wooed by two lovers at a festival takes a garland from one of them and puts it on her

own head but at the same time she removes her own garland and with it adorns the head of the other. Which is the favoured suitor, which has the preference?

We might almost expect to meet the story of the Lady or the Tiger.

Here is another: Which of two women is the more unhappy: she that has a lover and loses him or she that is hopeless of having one?

Again: Which of three lovers deserves preference: the strongest, the most courteous or the wisest? Methinks we again go back to the earliest times and witness the three goddesses bringing their bribes to Paris, son of Priam — whence the rape of Helen, the Trojan War, the voyages of Odysseus and the splendid cycle of hero-stories which grow like branches from a cedar of Lebanon.

Still another of these problematical cases propounds whether it is better to love a maid, a wife, or a widow; and illustrative of the *tenzone* or discussion are stories which in several cases are still further elaborated in the Decameron. In the last book of "Il Filocolo," which was written after Fiametta had withdrawn her favour from Boccaccio, occurs the episode wherein he

apparently, under allegorical figures, depicts his life and love.

Florio is represented as on his way back to his father's palace with the bride whom he had won in spite of all obstacles. But it pleases him first to revisit Napoli and let his beloved gaze at those enchanting landscapes. He takes her to the tepid baths of Baja, to the time-honoured tomb of Misenus, to the cave of Cumae. They look down on the glittering waves of the Myrtoan sea and the glories of Pozzuoli. He enjoys the pleasures of fishing and he hunts the red deer in the shady woods.

One day he hurls his javelin at a noble stag but misses his aim and the weapon is imbedded in the foot of a very lofty pine. After the example of the story of Polydorus, in Vergil, a stream of blood gushes forth from the spot where the bark was torn and a *dolorosa voce* tells the story of Idalagos. I will condense it:

In fruitful Italy, says the voice, lies a small tract of land which the ancients called Tuscany and in the midst of it rises a little hill (*i. e.*, Certaldo) whereon Eucomos (in other words Boccaccio di Chellino) pastured his silly sheep, nor was it far from those waves which the horses

of Phoebus, having passed the meridian circle, eagerly yearn for, that they may quench their burning thirst and find repose: and thither he went and there the gentle flock of Franconarcos, King of the White Country (that is, Philip II.) found pasturage which he watched with the greatest solicitude.

This king had a large flock of daughters with beauty adorned and in splendid costumes and one day, sent by their sire, they came with a most notable array of companions, to offer up sweet-smelling incense in a sacred temple dedicated to Minerva, which stood in an ancient forest, still rich in store of beauteous leaves and fruit.

Having accomplished their sacrifice and the day being well spent, they began to indulge in festal pleasures amid the delicious wood.

Near this forest Eucomos, above all shepherds most crafty and endowed with wit, chanced to be watching his flock and having with his own hands made a *sampogna*, or rustic pipe, which gave greater delight to those that heard it than any other sound, unwitting that the daughters of his lord had come, the sun at that time being hotter than at any other period of the day, he

had gathered his flock under the shade of a lofty maple and leaning his arm on his mystic crook was playing his *sampogna* to his own exceeding joy.

This sound coming to the ears of the errant maidens, they without delay drew near and after they had listened with delight to the music and had rejoiced to see the gambols of the silly sheep, one of them, named Giannai, the most beautiful of them all, called to Eucomos and begged him to give them his music that they might dance, and promised him a reward. He complied. It pleased them and they came back many times to hear him. Eucomos compelled his genius to most noble sounds and tried his best to delight Giannai, who, coming nearer than any of the others, kept urging him to play on. And her beauty ran to the eyes of Eucomos with gracious delight. And to her also came sweet thoughts. He in his own heart greatly praised her beauty and felt that the man whom the gods should deem worthy of possessing her would be indeed blessed and he wished that it were possible he might be the one.

And at these thoughts Cupid, the disturber of unanchored minds, descended from Parnassus

and came to that place and furtively instilled his poison into the rustic's veins, joining to desire sudden hope.

Three days later it chanced by Fate, who is the orderer of things mundane, conscious of the future, that Giannai alone of the sisters came with a small company of whom she felt no fear and begged him to play to her, and he obeyed. But soon he changed the sweet sounds of his music into the sweeter sounds of flattery and with deceitful promises he made her put full faith in him. "She bore him two sons," continues the speaking pine, "of whom I was one, and my name is Idalagos. But no long time elapsed after our birth ere he abandoned the silly maiden and returned with his flock to his own pastures and transferred the troth which he had pledged to Giannai to another called Garamita by whom in short space he had new offspring." Idalagos, whom we must understand to be the poet himself, says that he followed his father's footsteps all the days of his youth, but as the lofty qualities of his genius which he had received from Nature kept increasing, he turned his feet from the base of the hill — that is to say he turned his back upon his

father who was of lowly origin though probably rich by reason of successful trade — and rested his claims on admittance into the splendid society of Naples on his mother's noble birth — turned his feet from the *basso colle* and endeavoured by severer paths to attain to loftier things.

He relates how one day when wishing to enter the paternal roof two terrible and most ferocious bears — *orsi ferocissimi e terribili* — appeared before him with burning eyes, desirous of his death, and how from that time forth he abandoned the *paternali campi* and came to these lovely woods near Naples where, dwelling with Calmeta, *pastor solennissimo*, who knew so much of all things, he was attaining the summit of his desires.

There seems to be a certain similarity between Dante prevented by the three wild beasts from attaining the summit of his hill and Boccaccio attacked by the terrible and ferocious bears keeping him from his threshold.

He proceeds in his story: "One day as we were resting with our flocks he began to tell with his shepherd's pipes the new changes and the unthinkable courses of the silvery moon and

what the reason might be that it should lose and then gain its light and the like.

"These things I attended with the greatest diligence and so much did they delight my unpolished mind that I determined to know them. . . . and having abandoned the pastoral life, I disposed myself to follow Pallas in all respects."

Here we have again thinly disguised under the image of the two ferocious bears the guardians of the home to which as a bastard child he was not welcome and under the pseudonym of the astronomical shepherd Calmeta the learned Andalone del Negro whom he so often mentions as his master; and finally his abandonment of his trade. One more passage from this same story will show, also in allegorical language, how Boccaccio more than once loved before he saw Maria di Aquino and how his love for the young princess brought about his ruin:

"These woods," continues the tale, "seemed favourable for the pursuits of Pallas, but at certain seasons and especially when the Delphic one reached Aries, they were often visited by ladies who walked about with slow and graceful steps and I slowly followed them

so that though mine eyes were delighted with their grace I continued to escape the darts of Cupid, for I feared lest if I were wounded by them, my days would increase to my hurt; and being disposed to avoid them I gave myself up first to the cittern of Orpheus and secondly to being a good marksman."

And he goes on to tell how first of all from among the ladies, all of whom he came to know, a white dove led him through the young shrubbery, flitting on its quick wings while he followed with his bow and arrows. And when he was weary of this chase a *nera merla* — a black blackbird with red beak and full of delightful songs, occupied him; but in vain he sought to plant his arrows in her heart. And then a *pappagallo* — a parrot — still more enticingly urged him to the zeal of conquest, as it flew with its green winnowing wings through the shrubbery that hid it ever and anon from his eager eyes.

"But," says he, "the clever archer *Amore*, who, by hidden ways makes entrance into guarded hearts, now that the sweet time had come again, when the meadows, the fields and the trees bring forth, as the ladies were going to their

accustomed delight, caused from amongst their delightsome choir — *piacevole coro* — a pheasant to arise and as I followed it with my eyes, flying over the tops of the highest trees the beauty of its variegated plumage so distracted my mind though bent on more useful things, that I made ready to follow it, sparing neither art nor bow nor genius to accomplish it. Feeling my heart wholly contaminated by the poison of love so long avoided, recognising that I was caught in the very gin which I had hitherto escaped by my great discretion, I turned about and beheld the number of those beauteous ladies diminished by one whom I had hitherto regarded as more than any of the others beauteous.

"Then I recognised the deception practised by Love, who, not being able to get me into his power, like other men, had caught me by interest in other forms, first disposing my heart by various desires, to take to this and when, sighing, I turned toward the pheasant, the lady who had vanished from the midst of the others changing back into her pristine shape appeared before my eyes and thus spake: 'Why art thou ready to flee from me? None loves thee more than I do.'

"These words caused me more fear of deception than hope of future gain and I doubted because she was of a beauty far more splendid than the others and her origin was of lofty descent and she was full of the graces of Juno. Wherefore I declared that it was impossible that she should do aught else than make sport of me. And if I had been able I should have drawn back from what was begun. But the nobility of my heart, derived not from my father the shepherd but from my mother of royal birth, caused me to burn and I said: 'I will follow her and find out if she prove true in fact as she has been forward in speaking.'"

He satisfies himself that she is telling the truth and he says he took her as the loftiest treasure of his heart, and, as she seemed to love him better than any one else, he lived for some time content.

But the inconstant faith of woman's breast which brings her lover ever more delight caused her to prove false to him and she finally abandoned his miserable heart for another.

"To tell what was my anguish," he cries, "at suddenly losing an object so much loved and so far above all, when I with mine own eyes saw it carried off elsewhere, would be a waste of

words, for I see you already know, but nevertheless the hope still remained that I might turn her back and therefore I spared neither tears nor entreaties nor fatigues. But she refused to listen or heed, nor would she even look; wherefore in desperation at my torment I sought death but could not obtain it, not being as yet at the fated end of my days." But Venus had pity on him and changed him into a pine — in other words he pined away.

In another of Boccaccio's stories, the "Ameto," the same idea is repeated and the names of his Neapolitan loves are given as Pampinea and Abrotonia. Who they were in reality probably no one will ever know. But there can be no doubt that under the image of the royal pheasant with its brilliant plumage — he introduces the same bird again in the fourth book — he means Fiametta. Before Boccaccio finished "Il Filocolo" he wrote a long poem entitled "Filostrato"— "The Lover Subjected." It is based upon an episode of the Trojan war and it was composed during Fiametta's absence, as is proved by the dedicatory epistle. It is a story of intrigue, jealousy, deception; in spite of its classic names and affectations of antiquity it really

represents his own experiences in Naples. Another poem written in similar circumstances was "Teseide," also in *octave* like "Don Juan," and these two poems are the earliest known examples of that meter.

Dante wrote pastoral poetry in Latin, in imitation of the ancients, and so did Petrarca. Boccaccio had to follow their example. Petrarca's "Bucolicum Carmen" is assigned to the year 1346. Boccaccio's third eclogue is known to have been composed two years later and his sixteenth about 1363, while his idyll, "Ninfale d'Admeto," is thought to have been written in 1341 or 1342, about the time when he was returning to his father's house.

The story is in prose interspersed with *sestine* and perfectly simple. Ameto (Greek, Admetos), an uncouth and wandering huntsman, falls in love with Lia, a most beautiful nymph, and under the influence of the new passion he abandons his savage life and becomes civilised. On a day sacred to Venus he follows his fair one to a beautiful shaded meadow and sits with her by the side of a clear fountain. The temple of Venus is not far away — between the running waters of the Arno and the Mugnone —

whereby he is supposed to mean the church of San Giovanni Battista. Six other nymphs, Mopsa and Emilia, Adiona and Acrimonia, Agapes and Fiametta come along, two and two, and the usual *lieta brigata* is formed. Shepherd songs and *tenzoni* are sung and then Lia proposes that each one of them should narrate the story of their loves:

"You are all young," she says, "and I and our forms give no sign that we have lived or are still living without having felt or even now feeling the flames of that revered goddess whose temples we have visited this day."

Under the allegory of the seven nymphs each of whom at the end of her story sings a song in triolets to her special goddess: Pallas, Prudence; Diana, Justice; Pomona, Temperance; Bellona, Bravery; Venus, Love; Vesta, Hope; and Cebele, Faith, we have the four cardinal virtues and the three theological virtues typified both in idea and practice.

When the last of the nymphs has told her story and sung her triolet-song, their attention is attracted by a wonderful prodigy in the sky: seven swans and seven storks engage in a battle and the swans win the victory. Then suddenly

from on high flashes forth with dazzling brilliancy a pillar of fire like that which guided the Hebrews through the desert and a sweet voice is heard saying:

"I am the One and Triune Light of Heaven
Beginning and End of all things."

Io son luce del cielo unica e trina,
Principio e fine di ciascuna cosa.

Ameto then learns that the Venus whom the nymphs have been celebrating is not that lustful goddess who inspires inordinate desires in human beings but rather the divinity from whom descend into men's hearts genuine, true and holy passions — *i veri e guisti e santi amori.* In other words, she is the Holy Trinity, the God of Christianity. And when Ameto recovers his eyesight and looks at the seven nymphs — his seven Virtues, mind you — they appear to him more beautiful than ever and as they gaze up into the column of fire they also seem to be ablaze and he trembles lest they should be consumed — especially Agapes and Lia. And then once more he raises his eyes to the clear light; as one sees the coal burning in the fire so in this marvellous pillar of fire he perceives an effulgent body overmastering all other brightness, as

molten steel taken from the furnace flashes forth a multitude of sparks: but the form of the face and of the eyes divine he cannot distinguish and while he is still filled with wonder he again hears the goddess speaking in *terza rima* — as in the "Divina Commedia," which it is plain he imitating in all the machinery of the scene — as follows:

"Oh my dear sisters through whom are manifest the roads that lead into my realms for those that wish to mount and put on wings — your good works just and upright, straightforward, good, holy, and virtuous, worthy of praise, simple and modest, open the dark and nebulous eyes of Ameto that he may see the beauties of my joy."

Before the divine words are fully uttered the nymphs run to Ameto; Lia frees him from his soiled habiliments, dips him into the clear fountain, just as Lucia baptises Dante in the waters of the Lethe stream in the "Purgatory;" then renders him purified into the hands of Fiametta. Mopsa dries his eyes and removes the scales that had blinded him; Emilia directs his gaze to the visage of the goddess; Acrimonia increases the strength of his eyes that they may endure the supernal splendour; Adiona clothes him anew

with most grateful raiment; Agapes, breathing into his mouth, kindles within him the holy fire. And Ameto, turning to the seraphic vision begins a long address:

"*O Diva pegasea, O alte Muse* — O Pegasean Goddess, O lofty Muses — rule my feeble mind that it may endure such things and make my genius subtle to contemplate them in order that if it be possible for tongue of man to tell of the beauty of things mine may succeed in telling of them."

Then, after further prayers and promises and after the apparition has returned to heaven, the nymphs sing angelically in a circle round him. And Ameto in joy lends his ear to their song and his heart to sweet thoughts. His old life seemed repulsive to him; hitherto he had mingled with fauns and satyrs; his ears had been delighted with only the primitive songs of the shepherds; hitherto the nymphs had pleased his eye rather than his intellect; now they appeal to his intellect rather than to the sensual vision: in other words, to sum up his long monologue, it seemed to him that he had grown from a brute animal into a man. Whereupon he sings a hymn to the goddess:

"O divine Light which in three persons and one essence governs the heavens and the earth with justice and love and eternal reason."

O diva luce quale in tre persone
Ed una essenza il ciel govarni e'l mondo,
Con giusto amore ed eterna ragione.

And when it is finished, the hour being late, the nymphs depart and Ameto returns to his home.

Most characteristic of the morals and notions of the Renascence is this grotesque, poetic, allegorical story of Boccaccio's spiritual regeneration. The mixture of paganism and Christianity—just as in the "Divine Comedy"—seems to us absurd and almost repulsive, and what shall be said when we remember that each of these seven nymphs representing the highest virtues of the Church — in telling the story of her love begins first by speaking of her husband and then goes on to reveal a state of connubial irregularity such as could only be rectified by a Nebraska or Chicago divorce court!

In several of the narrations delivered by the seven nymphs we might find the omnipresent allegory of Boccaccio's own experiences. He seemed never to tire of introducing it, and we find it again in his greatest poem, the "Amorosa"

"Visione" and in the book of sonnets which so closely follows in plan Petrarca's example. The "Amorosa Visione" consists of fifty short poems in the meter which Dante liked so well, and one may get some idea of its artifice when one realises that it forms one vast acrostic. All the first verses of the *terzine* are joined together to form two tailed sonnets and a double-tailed sonnet which contains the dedication to Fiametta. He himself acknowledged his indebtedness to Dante and bids his book follow modestly the great Florentine poet, *come piccolo servidore* — like a little servant.

The admiration which Boccaccio felt for Dante was genuine and beautiful, but even in his imitations the contrast between the two men never fails to appear. We see Dante stern and almost forbidding, a master among prophets, striding along with bent head and gloomy brow, viewing the earth as merely a halting-place of trial and sorrow; consequently his ideal of love is so lofty and distant from earth that it narrowly escapes being an abstraction; on the other hand, Boccaccio is filled with the worship of earthly beauty. Beauty is his religion and, consequently, love in his eyes in spite of his

endeavour to raise it to divine heights is ever clad in seductive palpitating flesh and blood. Between the two stands Petrarca! Is it not indeed a wonderful trio to be living in one land at one and the same time?

But to understand the contrast between Dante and Boccaccio one must understand the spirit of the times. One extreme invariably leads to another or even exists with it simultaneously. While we have on the one hand the lofty mysticism of Dante and the bigotry of Saint Francis and the extravagances of the flagellants; on the other we have the new school of Provençal poets who, even while taking part in Crusades wrote the obscenest of poems; we find the scandalous stories of Fra Salimbene. Boccaccio, as the favourite of a corrupt court, did not hesitate to be himself corrupt, even while he was singing the praises of an incorruptible Church!

It seems probable that Boccaccio's stepmother had died and that the legitimate children had also left the father desolate: he speaks of the paternal mansion as being *oscura, muta e molta triste* — dark, silent and very sad. While Boccaccio di Chellino, now old cold, harsh,

and avaracious, desired his presence he returned to the home which he had so little reason to love and while dwelling with the father whom he had also little reason to reverence, he seemed to be in a melancholy prison made all the darker by contrast with those joyous fortunate days at Naples.

He found some consolation, however, in beautiful Florence, and his ever susceptible heart was soon on fire once more. He discovered a young widow and began to pay court to her: but while she pretended to accept his homage she really made sport of him and showed his letters to another of her lovers. Boccaccio learned of this treachery and by way of revenge wrote another allegoric vision entitled "Corbaccio"—"A Nasty Crow." He seemed to be following a delicious pathway but it led him into a savage mountainous forest and a shade appears — just as Vergil appears to Dante — ready to show him the way out. While Dante in the *selva oscura* understands the present life, to Boccaccio the ragged forest signifies love, from which he is liberated by human reason. But the apparition is not Vergil by any means: it is the deceptive widow's dead husband, who

had been enjoying the torments of purgatory as a penance for his avarice and also for his unbecoming patience in enduring his wife's wretched habits. Now he is dead and no longer tormented by jealousy, he feels nothing but the deepest pity for all those that fall into the toils of her who had been for a time his earthly cross.

At the intercession of the Celestial Virgin, for whom Messer Giovanni had always shown unusual devotion, God had sent him to save the poet and he accomplishes the grateful task by saying all manner of evil of women in general and of his own widow in particular.

The modern reader would not find great edification in this somewhat irreverent allegory, in this catalogue of woman's frailties. The book would hardly be chosen as a text-book in a young ladies' seminary. Many of the nettlish stings are borrowed boldly from the satires of Juvenal, but Boccaccio's own experience furnished him with an abundant supply of new ones. The most harmless are those in which he depicts the vanity of women, as they practise their graces before the mirror or in church; while pretending to be counting their beads they are casting furtive glances at the men.

III

This savage satire seems to put an end to the most frivolous part of Boccaccio's life. His father died in 1348 or 1349 and in spite of his irregular birth he inherited a large share of the old man's wealth. Shortly afterward he entered into friendly relations with Petrarca and this friendship lasted until Petrarca's death. Indeed, in a letter to Francesco da Brossano he claimed that he had belonged to him for forty years. His first actual acquaintance with "the greatest glory of Italy" began in 1350, when Petrarca passed through Florence on his way to receive the poet's crown at Rome. The following year Boccaccio was sent by the Commune to Padua to invite him to take the direction of the new University. They spent several days together in the famous garden in which Petrarca so delighted and if only there could have been present a shorthand reporter — a chiel amang 'em takin' notes — what a precious legacy it would have been! We can have it only in the imaginative dialogue of Walter Savage Landor.

In the spring of 1389 they spent a few days together in Milan and from this time their friendship became most intimate. Boccaccio never let slip an occasion to praise and venerate him whom he called *præceptor meus*. Petrarca, as might be imagined, exerted a highly moral, influence upon him, though Boccaccio confesses that it did not go to the extent of a complete regeneration — *amores meos, etsi non plene satis tamen vertit in melius*. So he confesses, and he commemorates in his fifteenth eclogue this exemplary influence where he describes the shepherd Filostrafo as chiding Tiflo.

What bound the two men together was their love for antiquity. Boccaccio knew some Greek and at Petrarca's solicitation translated Homer into Latin prose. That he did not succeed better was due to the limited knowledge of his teacher, the Calabrian Leonzio Pilato, who at Boccaccio's invitation taught in the University from 1360 until 1363.

Boccaccio, under the influence of the ideas of his time, came to look upon Italian poetry as a foolish juvenile occupation. Thenceforth his later works, with a few exceptions, are written in Latin. One, entitled "De Montibis, Sylvis,"

Lacubus, Fluminibus, Stagnis seu Paludibus, de Nominibus Maris Liber," is regarded as the first modern dictionary of geography. A grave and almost ascetic book is his Latin treatise "De Claris Mulieribus," "Concerning Famous Women" — and yet even in this he cannot refrain from piquant stories which contrast so curiously with the general spirit of the work.

Another, entitled "De Genealogiis Deorum Gentilium," "Concerning the Genealogies of the Heathen Gods" — is a vast compilation written about 1366 at the suggestion of Ugo IV., King of Cyprus and Jerusalem. Of course his knowledge had its limitations and the critical spirit was wanting; but such books, full of superstitions and fables, such quaint and curious fallacious theories as they may be, were useful in their day.

Boccaccio was greatly honoured in his own city. Three times he was sent on important embassies. In 1365 he was at Avignon charged with the duty of calming the resentment of Urban V. against Florence. Two years later he bore to Rome the congratulations of the Commune on the return of the Papal Court to Italy.

At one time he almost became a citizen of Naples again. Niccolò Acciaiuoli, a Florentine, who had gone there many years before as a merchant and had risen to be Grand Seneschal to the Queen, made him splendid promises, and feeling that he might have leisure for his beloved studies he decided to go. But though he had dedicated his book "Concerning Famous Women" to Andrea, sister to Niccolò and his flattering mention of the queen had preceded him, he found himself subjected to the shabbiest treatment. The letter that describes his experiences is still in existence.

In 1367 he visited Petrarca's daughter and her husband Francesco de Brossano and for a year or two he actually lived in Naples; Queen Giovanna's third husband offered him gracious protection; but the year of Petrarca's death the city of Florence began a course of public lectures on Dante's "Divina Commedia" and Boccaccio was invited to fill the chair. Boccaccio was the first to write Dante's life and his commentary on the works of the great poet, though it was left unfinished, contains many explanation which are invaluable. His salary was 100 golden florins. He began his lectures in the

church of San Stefano on October 18, 1373, and gave them every day until early in January, 1374, when an attack of scurvy, or possibly leprosy, compelled him to resign.

One curious little episode in Boccaccio's life seems to throw a light on his character. In 1362 a monk by the name of Gioacchino Ciani came to see him in Florence and told him that he was sent by a Saint Pietro Petroni, who on his death-bed had seen a vision of Christ and reading in his face the past, the present and the future he had learned that unless Boccaccio should change his scandalous mode of life he would suffer eternal torment. Such a message from an earnest though misguided "crank" even now might well have an effect upon a man's imagination. Boccaccio lived in a superstitious age and his alarm was aroused. He was on the point of following Ciani's advice to sell his books, abandon his studies and burn his Italian writings. Fortunately he consulted Petrarca who wrote him that Ciani was probably an impostor and that he had better change his habits but not renounce his studies which had been the consolation of his past life. He came to his senses and kept on with his learned labours.

In the autumn of 1374 he returned to Certaldo, broken in health, and here he remained until his death December 21, 1375. His will is preserved: in it he left his books to Padre Fra Martino da Signa; to the convent of Santa Maria di San Sepolcro he bequeathed many sacred relics and other objects which he had picked up in the course of his life.

IV

Just as Petrarca is remembered chiefly by his *canzoniere*, so Boccaccio stands as the representative of the story-teller of the Renascence. And the "Decameron" is justly regarded as his masterpiece; though just as Petrarca repented having written and published his sonnets so Boccaccio declared in a letter written in 1373 that the perusal of the book was perilous and unedifying, especially for women.

Mention of this great work has been purposely left to the last. In 1348 the plague was ravaging Florence. Boccaccio's description of its horrors at the beginning of the "Decameron" stands in the same category of vivid narration

as De Foe's word-picture of the great London fire. The device employed for stringing the stories together is, as we have shown, as old as the hills. Seven young ladies and three young men meet in the church of Santa Maria Novella and agree to abandon the unfortunate city. They shut themselves up in a beautiful villa and spend their days in gay dalliance, singing, eating, drinking. And when the sun shines too fiercely they gather in the bosky shades of the garden and day after day under the direction of their duly chosen *re* or *regina* relate their gay, frivolous, often indecent stories.

The name "Decameron," like that of the "Divina Commedia," was a later invention. Boccaccio at first entitled the work "L'Opera di dieci giorni" but afterward in his quality as a Greek scholar added the Greek title, which means the same thing.

Boccaccio's originality in this work consisted in its frame and in the manner in which he used materials already extant. If there is any moral in them, it is accidental; the value of true friendship may be illustrated; the power of a word rightly spoken is shown; it may teach young women to beware of the snares of men

and especially of scholars. But the sole object of the stories is amusement and the remarkable variety of the incidents is all bent to this same focus.

In Morley's "Universal Library" are to be found forty of these *novelle*. There is, therefore, no need to go into any analysis of their style or of their contents. They are like "the Widow Cruse's oil jar"; poets, playwrights, novelists for half a millennium have pillaged them and still they are as fresh and full of life as ever. Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" is the first contemporaneous imitation and there is certainly a great resemblance between the two men and their genius, though Chaucer is freer from the affectations of the pedant.

Of course, as the "Decameron" is not an original invention with Boccaccio, we can hardly say that all the collections of stories similarly conjoined are imitations of his work; nor should we have space to mention half of them. They string along through the ages, from "Il Pecorone" of Ser Giovanni Fiorentino, which was composed three years after Boccaccio's death, in 1378, to William Morris's "Earthly Paradise." Indeed, it is a mooted question whether the famous mediæval collection made by some unknown monk and

called the "Gesta Romanorum" was not subsequent to Boccaccio.

It may be interesting, however, to mention briefly one way in which these old stories come filtered down to us and it will be easily seen how inexhaustible a field it offers for study and research. Symonds says:

In their material the *novelle* embraced the whole of Italian society, furnishing pictures of its life and manners from the palaces of princes to the cottages of *contadini*. Every class is represented — the man of books, the soldier, the parish priest, the cardinal, the counter-jumper, the confessor, the peasant, the duke, the merchant, the noble lady, the village maiden, the serving man, the artisan, the actor, the beggar, the courtesan, the cutthroat, the astrologer, the lawyer, the physician, the midwife, the thief, the preacher, the nun, the pander, the fop, the witch, the saint, the galley-slave, the friar — they move before us in a motley multitude like the masquerade figures of carnival time, jostling one another in a whirl of merriment and passion, mixing together in the frank democracy of vice. . . . It is only the surface of existence that the *novelliere* touches. He leaves its depths unanalysed except when he plunges a sinister glance into some horrible abyss of cruelty or lust, or stirred by gentler feeling paints an innocent, unhappy, youthful love. The student of contemporary Italian customs will glean abundant information from these pages; the student of human nature gathers little except reflections on the morals of sixteenth century society. It was perhaps this prodigal superfluity of striking incident in combination with poverty of intellectual content which made the *novelle* so precious to our playwrights.

To trace all the plots of the English stage from Marlowe to Dryden, from Dryden to Sheridan, one would have to read the stories of Sercambi of Lucca and the 300 of Franco Sacchetti, and a century later those of Il Lasca and the "Disporti" of Giralamo Parabosco and the 214 *novelle* of Matteo Bandello, and Giraldi's "Hecatomithi," or Hundred Tales, and Francesco Straparola's "Thirteen Pleasant Evenings" and thousands of others.

Just a few examples of the use that Shakespeare alone made of these treasure-houses of dramatic plots must suffice.

From the last-mentioned — "Le Tredici piacevoli notti," of Straparola — came several hints utilized in "The Merry Wives of Windsor" — the plurality of loves and the ladies contributing to one another the addresses of the same gallant. "Much Ado About Nothing" is largely based on the twenty-second *novella* of Bandello in which Il Signore Scipione Attillano narrates how Il Signore de Cardona, being with King Piero di Aragona in Messina, falls in love with Fenicia Lionata. This was translated into French and it is supposed that an English version of Belleforest at one time existed.

"Measure for Measure" has curious parallelisms with Cinthio's, the fifth *novella* of "Hecatomithi."

"Romeo and Juliet" is partially based on a novel by Arthur Broke translated from another of Bandello's great store. "The Merchant of Venice" is made up of several strands but that which relates the story of the pound of flesh is found in "Il Pecorone," that is to say "The Dunce or Blockhead," being the adventures of Gianetto. While the suggestion of the three caskets is found in the "Gesta Romanorum," "Cymbeline" is based upon Boccaccio's tale of "Bernabo da Genova."

These are only hints. But they go to prove the proposition so carefully elaborated by Count Gozzi that there do not exist more than thirty-six tragic situations, or the still more scientific estimate of Signor Polti, who having analysed and classified some eight hundred dramas and two hundred novels, reduced them to the same, which number may indeed be still further reduced to the classic number seven. Probably all in last analysis go back to actual occurrences or grew out of actual occurrences. Truth is forever stranger than fiction.

V

THE RISE OF THE ITALIAN DRAMA

NO SISTERS ever had a more dissimilar education and fate than the four who are poetically and metaphorically taken to represent India, Persia, Greece and Rome. Sprung from one common mother, they became strangers and foes and apparently the only common bond among them was a parcel of linguistic roots so buried and hidden that they themselves had no knowledge of their united heritage nor was it suspected until within a few generations.

Back of this family relationship is a deeper reason why nations so widely remote from one another should trace back their indigenous drama to similar sources: that is the dramatic instinct implanted in the human heart. It crops out typically in young children who endue their dolls or toys with life and delightfully alarm themselves with their own imaginings.

Children vary greatly in imaginative power. So it is not strange to find, by analogy, one nation having vastly more dramatic or musical

genius than another. National gods are national qualities personified: Kama-Deva, the Indian god of love, at whose festivals, at summer's beginning, scenic entertainments were early popular, conditioned the Hindu drama, of which Sakuntala is the most perfect flower. Strictly speaking, the Hindu drama had no tragedy, because, as Professor Monier Williams says, although joy and sorrow, happiness and misery, are woven in a mingled web—good and evil, right and wrong, truth and falsehood are allowed to blend in the early acts of the drama, yet "in the last act, harmony is always restored, order succeeds to disorder, tranquillity to agitation, and the mind of the spectator, no longer perplexed by the apparent ascendency of evil, is soothed and purified and made to acquiesce in the moral lesson deducible from the plot."

The magnificent flowering of the Greek drama antedated by centuries the Hindu, though both were religious in origin. This connection of the drama with religion is universal. They may be bitterly jealous of each other, but it is the jealousy of husband and wife. The very word *pulpit* means stage, and the first scene

was played in front of the flower-crowned altar of Dionysos.

The Greeks, in spite of their petty internal jealousies, were one people, worshipping the same gods. Hence the task of tracing the rise of the Hellenic drama, from the goat choruses of the Dorians—the very word tragedy hiding in it the nature myth of which the goat was the symbol—to the lofty sacred dramas of Aischylos is comparatively simple.

But the Italian peninsula was inhabited by a wonderfully mixed population. Not to speak of the pure Greek colonies of the southeastern coast and of Sicily, we may feel certain that the legends of Æneas and his descendant Romulus and of the Tarquins point to Greek origin. But there were other prehistoric races inhabiting the country, and many scholars believe that the artistic Etruscans, whose language has longest of any on earth resisted all keys and is still a locked casket, were Kelts. Keltic Spain contributed to the Roman drama its most famous name. Wonderful that those dramatic characteristics which make the Irish the most brilliant actors should have held through all the centuries! One might almost say that every one of the

seven hills of Rome stood for a different nationality--Etruscan, Sabine, Oscan, Sikulian —whose mixture produced that world-conquering city. Even the Latin tongue, compared with the Greek or Sanskrit, shows the effect of violent friction and hard use, and seems like an older and more wrinkled daughter of the common mother-tongue.

We must not forget that in a certain sense Rome was or became a great robber stronghold. Much as we may admire the Roman sternness and dignity, we must not forget that it was wholly military and aggressive. Paulus Æmilius ravaged sixty cities of Epeiros and carried one hundred and fifty thousand Greeks into captivity; Metellus and Silvanus laid Macedonia waste; Sulla plundered Athens and Delphi; Pompey conquered fifteen kingdoms, eight hundred cities and over one thousand fortresses; Crassus brought ten thousand talents away from Jerusalem. Every town or province which Rome laid hands upon became the legitimate spoil of a succession of irresponsible and rapacious proconsuls. It is pathetic to read in Roman history that Lucius Mummius —most appropriate name—caused Greek actors

to produce a Greek drama in celebration of his glory in sacking Corinth and waging successful war in Greece.

"The dramatic muse," says J. L. Klein, "was brought to Rome as a slave and a slave she always remained." Consequently, Greek plays, original or imitated, fill no small part of the history of the Roman stage. The indigenous Roman drama, though it did not reach sublime heights commensurate with the power and extent of the Empire, had really a vastly important influence through tradition. The Romans were men of action. They had no ideality, no invention, they represented in themselves the iron fate of the nations, "the barbaric zeal for conquest and enslaving of other peoples goes to found a kingdom of darkness in contradistinction to the creative light kingdom of energetic poesy. The spirit of tragedy shuts out the Roman spirit, just as the freedom idea is exclusive of the military spirit destructive of nations." Klein, whose words I have just paraphrased, goes on to declare that the one God of Freedom must be composed of pure philosophy; God's revelation as spirit and self-conscious thought of pure religion; God's revelation as harmony of beings

and souls, in other words love and of pure art which in its highest manifestation is tragic art. This trinity-unity was wholly lacking in the typical Roman character. Utterly subversive of true tragic art it must have been when the Roman audience demanded realism for action: when Muzio Scævola was seen actually burning off his hand and Hercules, wrapt in the poisoned robe of Nessus mounted the pyre and was consumed to ashes in the presence of ten thousand spectators; when death in its most repulsive aspect was presented before the gaping throng. In such a spirit Othello would really murder Desdemona and Romeo really run "Mercutio's kinsman, noble County Paris" through the heart!

If the Greek drama began in graceful hymns sung with choric dances to the beneficent God of the Vine—Dionysos, with face equally capable of joy and grief, symbol of life returning from death, of resurrection after burial, of sorrow for past beauty and joy for recreated life—the Roman drama, on the contrary, originated, according to Livy, about four hundred years after the founding of the city, in an an attempt to put a stop to the plague that had been rag-

ing for two years. Livy says, "When the violence of the disease was alleviated neither by human measures nor by divine interference, their minds being prone to superstition, among various means of appeasing the wrath of the gods scenic plays are said also to have been instituted—a new thing to a warlike people who had hitherto had only the spectacles of the circus. But the affair was insignificant (as beginnings generally are) and moreover from a foreign source."

He goes on to tell how actors, or rather dancers, were imported from Etruria, who danced to the measures of a flute-player though without song or pantomime, and how afterwards the young Romans began to imitate these and to add jocular verses, impromptu, with gestures appropriate to the action.

The Etruscan word for actor was (*h*)*ister* and these native performers were called *histriones*, from which our word histrionic is derived.

The medleys which they performed came to be written in regular meter fitted to music and provided with probably conventional gesticulation. They were called *satiræ*, or satires, from a word meaning a full dish or a dish of mixed

ingredients. Some etymologists have connected the word with the Greek satiric drama, which is supposed to have been invented by Pratinas about 500 B. C., and came to form the fourth part of Tetralogy.

"Livius Andronicus," says Livy, "was the first who ventured to substitute for the satire a story with a regular plot, and when, from having been too frequently called upon to sing his piece, his voice was ruined, he is said to have obtained permission to place a boy before the flute player to sing and to have acted the song with considerably more liveliness because the employment of the voice was no longer an impediment." His first play was produced in the year 240 B. C.

After this the duties of the singers and the actors were separated: the dialogue left to the latter. By this arrangement the stage business was raised from mere farce and gradually became an art.

Livius Andronicus, it will be proper to mention, was a Greek captured at the siege of Tarentum and brought to Rome as a prisoner of war. Thus again Rome had to go abroad for her first genuine drama; and this genuine drama, com-

posed of three elements, song with flute music, dance with gestures, and dialogue, seems to be the three-fold root from which we might derive opera, pantomime and the play. Horace in his noble epistle to Augustus (Lib. II., 1) also gives an account of the rise of the Latin drama. He tells how the early farmers, happy in their small estate, after their crops were gathered in, sacrificed a pig to Tellus and poured out milk to Silvanus, and offered flowers and wine to their genius, and then with their helpmeets, their children and their faithful wives, indulged in the *fescennina carmina*, which were extemporised verses full of raillery and coarse humour, of old jokes and obscene singing.* The Atillan farces of Oscan origin were also transplanted to Rome. Here was the germ of the native comedy and it is far more interesting and important than the more dignified drama imported with Greek statues and Greek rhetoric.

It would seem, then, as if the gift of impro-

* These are not to be confounded with the *Carmina Arvalia* sung at the festival of the "Creative Goddess" with hymns to the *Lares agrestes:* only one has come down to us: one example of this religious litany sung antiphonally —

Enos, Lases, iuvate,

calling upon Mars as *Marmar* and ending with a four-times repeated *triumphe*: for these are hieratic and priestly: while the *fescinnine impromptus* were thoroughly popular.

visation were as indigenous to the climate of Italy as the native olive-trees. It is an extremely interesting phenomenon as we see it standing out in those dim far-off days, and with no less distinction through the Middle Ages down to our own time. The survival of characteristics in nations is as wonderful as the transmission of characteristics from generation to generation of individuals and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the *commedie improvise*, or improvised farces, of the fifteenth centuries were legitimate children of the comedies that were played in all parts of Italy even hundreds of years before Christ.*

The name *fescennine* is commonly derived from a town, Fescennia, which the histories and dictionaries call Etruscan but which was really Faliscan; the derivation however is far more significant. It comes from an ancient Latin word, *fascinum*, from which is derived our word *fascination*. It meant a charm or amulet worn as a protection against the evil-eye, the *jettatura*, so commonly believed in even to the present day. It was a phallic

* The action of the Roman *Centunculus* and almost his name are preserved in the Italian *Arlequino*.

symbol and as such goes back to the most primitive belief of the human race, in which all nations, Greek and Italian, South Sea Island and Central African, Indians and Eskimos, are at one: it points to the great mystery of the origin of life, and hence its appropriateness as connected with primitive marriage institutions, and hence also the conventional scurrilities of the drama that thence arose, innuendoes but perfectly free from malice.

The Atellan farces likewise were so called not because they originated in the Oscan town of Atella near Naples, but simply because these farces had what one might call conventionalised fixed characters and a perennial scheme of jokes and therefore needed a permanent and established scene. So the ruined Oscan capital, Atella, was chosen. There was no danger of sectional jealousies in such a choice.

The principal characters presenting types that became as familiar as *Falstaff* or *Captain Bobadill* or *Sir Andrew Ague-Cheek* or *Mascarille* were *Pappus* or *Casnar*, the stupid vain old man; *Bucco*, the fat, chattering glutton; *Maccus*, the filthy, amorous fool, and *Dossenus* the cunning sharper.

The meter in which some of these were written is called saturnine: it does not sound so portentous when one remembers that it is the same as we find in that delicious poem of our childhood days,

> The Queen was in her parlour
> Eating bread and honey:—
>
> *Dabánt malúm Metélli*
> *Naevió poétae.*

Naevius, whose plays held the boards till the time of Horace, employed this meter: only a few fragments have come down to us.

Sicily was an early home of the drama. Epicharmos of Syracuse is credited with being the inventor, not only of character comedies, but of the great type of the parasite. The Sicilian influence spread as easily to the north as to the east. Three of Rome's earliest dramatists, Livius, Naevius and Ennius, were Greeks from the south and of course introduced imitations of Greek plays. Ennius *pater*, as Horace calls him, copied Epicharmos. History is often reported as repeating herself. She is the great plagiarist. The phenomena of the Elizabethan age are found in Athens and in Rome. Like causes produce like effects.

Greene, Marlowe, Kyd, Jonson, Shakespeare, began as actors, revamped old plays, wrote new ones; collaborated, invented—all to supply the incessant demand of the stage managers. Going back two thousand years, we find almost precisely the same conditions.

I should like to trace the curious analogy between Plautus and Shakespeare. The humble origin, the birth in the obscure country town, the move to the capital; the menial employment in or about the theatre; the wonderfully absorbed education, the fame, the wealth.

Titus Maccius (not M. Accius) Plautus was born in a little Umbrian town under the shadow of the Appennines about 250 B. C., and died at the age of seventy. His flourishing career was contemporary with the second Punic war. In one of his plays he introduces a Carthaginian slave, and the whole scene is in the Carthaginian dialect. The name Plautus, or Plotus, like the Greek *Platús*, signifies flat-footed, and it is said that he was chosen on account of this umbrian peculiarity to take the part of the *Planipedes* in the Mimes. This is absurd. No less so the name of *Asinius* into which his ethnic name of Sarcinius, from his

native town of Sarcina, was corrupted. If he painted himself in his character of *Pseudolus*, as Lessing thinks, he had a swarthy complexion, red hair, a protuberant abdomen, a huge head, keen eyes and immensely fat legs.

If not a slave, he did the menial work of a slave; but while turning the miller's wheel, he was composing comedies, and at last he rose to his natural level, as all talent, like water, must rise.

Only Livius Andronicus and Gnaeus Naevius of his contempories could rival him. But they were *mere* imitators, Plautus also imitated Menander and Diphilos and Philemon and Apollodoros, but he was more than an imitator. He treated his prototypes as Shakespeare treated them (in the "Comedy of Errors" for instance) as Corneille treated Alarcon.

He kept what suited him and his environment, and knowing Rome, he added those comic creations which delighted Roman audiences for almost five hundred years.

Among the curiosities at the museum at Naples is a *tessera*, or theatre ticket, found at Pompeii and containing besides the designation of the seat the title of the play which was per-

formed in 63 B. C. and the name of the author, Plautus's "Casina," which was still popular two hundred and fifty years after his death. Like Shakespeare, his popularity seems to have at one time suffered an eclipse. Horace, who probably preferred the pure Greek comedy (as England till lately preferred French comedies), speaks slightingly of him.

But Plautus is more real to America than the Italian drama was before the coming of Salvini and Signora Duse. In 1890 the students of St. Xavier's College, New York City, performed his "Captivi," a play which some critics consider the best in existence. These young Jesuits repeated the play as a part of the New York State educational exhibit during the time of the Chicago Exposition with great success.

Thus in a certain sense Plautus may be said to belong to the modern drama. But even more in the influence which he has exerted on all modern playwrights. Rotrou, Camoens, Molière and Dryden copied his "Amphitruo." "L'Avare" is a copy of his "Aulularia." Regnard and Addison imitated his "Mostellaria." "The Comedy of Errors" is a variation of his "Menaechmi."

Lessing's "Schatz" is an imitation of his "Trinummus."*

Twenty years after Plautus' death arose another comic writer whose influence on the drama of Europe was destined to be even greater than Plautus'. This was a slave whose name is believed to have been *Publipor.* He was born in Carthage and was brought to Rome as the slave of a Roman senator named Publius Terentius Lucanus, from whom he took his name of Terence. As Rome and Carthage were then at peace and as Terence had not the complexion of a Phœnician, it is likely that he was the son of some Celtiberian colonist who had been transported to Africa. He did not know Latin so perfectly as Plautus and it was charged that Publius Scipio, who was his first benefactor, merely used him as a cat's paw—that the comedies attributed to the slave were really the general's! It is the Shakespeare-Bacon controversy carried back two thousand years. Undoubtedly he had help.

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* "Casina," which in spite of its mutilated condition tells its ever fresh and comic story, was imitated in the sixteenth century by Niccolò Machiavelli in his *Clizia,* and by many other Italian dramatists. In the records of the Italian Courts the Latin Comedies of Plautus are constantly mentioned as a part of the festal amusements.

Both Plautus and Terence wrote the *commoedia palliota;* but whereas Plautus, though he laid his scenes in Greece gave the local colouring, the customs, the characters, the style all Roman, Terence, catering to a more cultivated audience, made his plays entirely Greek. He had no invention but the most refined art. Only six of his plays have come down to us and these six have the same set of characters under somewhat varying circumstances: the two fathers who are brothers; the two sons and their sweethearts, one of the girls marrying one cousin, the other seduced by cunning or violence remains as the mistress of the other cousin; the indispensable servant helping the intrigue with his cleverness and aptitude.

Terence had a wonderful gift for painting character and morals; he had not Plautus' abundant and overflowing wit. It is a question whether Terence, with what has been called his "pedagogic end," really succeeded in the teaching of morals so well as Plautus, who had no such end in view. But Plautus, in the prologue to the "Captivi," recognises the moral end of comedy. "It is not," he says, "a trite and elaborated story, as many others be, nor are there in it

obscene verses unworthy of mention, nor perjured panderer, nor shameless jade, nor braggart soldier." *

Mommsen, in his "History of Rome," makes a long and elaborate comparison between Plautus and Terence. Many of his sentences are well worth citing, but it deserves to be read as a whole and not piecemeal. It is a masterpiece of literary balancing.

The legend runs that Terence perished 159 B. C. in a storm on the coast of Greece and that with him were lost his translation of one hundred and eight of the comedies of Menander which he was carrying back to Rome with him. He was only thirty-five years of age.

Terence undoubtedly had a greater influence on after times than Plautus: Ariosto, Aretine, Lodovico Dolce, Battista Porta, Machiavelli and many other of the Italian dramatists were directly indebted to him.

Molière's "Ecole des Maris" is Terence: Shadwell's "Squire of Alsatia" is Terence: *Manlove* and *Nightshade* in Cumberland's "Chol-

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* *Nam pertractate factast neque item ut ceterae, neque spurcidici insunt versus immemorabiles: hic neque periurus lenost nec meretrix mala neque miles gloriosus.*

eric Man" are modern representatives of *Micio* and *Demea*, *Knowell*, in Jonson's "Every Man in His Humour" is *Micio*, from the "Adelphi." Sir Richard Steele's "Conscious Lovers" is *Andrea*. Molière's *Scapin* is *Davus*, the *currens servus*; Aretine's "La Talanta" and Sedley's "Bellamira" are from the "Eunuchus." Mrs. Inchbald's "Every One Has His Fault" is a variation of Terence's "Phormio." That wonderful German nun, Hrothvita, whose pious comedies are one of the precious relics of the tenth century, copied Terence. The tale is endless.*

Cicero placed neither Terence nor Plautus at the head of the Latin comic poets. He says Caius Caecilius Statius was perhaps the greatest — *fortasse summus poeta comicus*.

He also was a slave; but of his forty or fifty comedies nothing is left but a few fragments. If only some dramatic Agassiz would arise, who from these broken bones could reconstruct the whole organism of the plays! But they are lost forever. Only three names are preserved, and these point also to Menander and Greek origin.

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* Nor must we forget that Terence also is to be represented in the modern stage in his original Latin: the students of Harvard have now enacted the "Phormio" at Sanders Theater.

Of Latin tragedy only one name concerns us; Lucius Annaeus Seneca, who was born shortly after the beginning of our era in the patrician colony of Corduba, now Cordova, in Spain. He was brought to Rome when a boy, was carefully educated, studied the Stoic philosophy, enjoyed distinguished honours under the Emperor Claudius, fell in love with the Princess Julia, and at the instigation of the jealous and dangerous Messalina was banished to Corsica, whence after eight years of exile he was recalled to Rome by Agrippina, the mother of Nero. He became praetor and consul and tutor to Nero;* and being involved in the conspiracy of Piso, he died the death of a double suicide by poison and by bleeding in his bath, A. D. 65.

There is a question whether the tragedies that bear the name of Seneca belong to the philosopher or to another of the same name. Nor does it make much difference except so far as it is interesting that the only tragic poet whose works have come down to us arose from Spain. Again we have the Shakespeare-Bacon myth, like Proteus, ever changing its form but the same at heart.

* He acquired the enormous wealth of 300,000,000 sesterces, and was accused by jealous rivals of all manner of crimes.

There were tragic writers before Seneca. Horace, in his "Ars Poetica" says: "Our poets left naught untried nor was it their slightest merit that they dared to desert Greek foot-marks [or paths, *vestigia*] and to celebrate domestic events." Marcus Pacuvius, the learned nephew of Ennius, a native of Brundusium, who flourished about two hundred years before Seneca, wrote a dozen tragedies. Lucius Attius or Accius translated Aischylos' "Prometheus Desmotes" and wrote a work on the drama called "Pragmatica." Both Pacuvius and Attius wrote *praetextae*, or tragedies, based on Roman history. Nothing is left of them.

Of Asinius Pollio, who, according to Vergil, was worthy to be compared with Sophokles, not a single line remains; all that is known of him is that he sang the *facta regum*, the deeds of the kings; we have only two half lines of Varius Rufus, who received a million sesterces, or five thousand dollars, for his "Thyestes" which was played to celebrate the battle of Actium.

Only half a line remains of Pomponius Secundus, whose erudition and elegance caused Quinctilian to place him far ahead of all others. And of the imperial dramatists, C. Octavius

Augustus and Julius Cæsar himself, scarcely a *plaudite* is left. Of all those scores of tragedies not one has come down to us, a few names, empty names — the story of the Elizabethan drama anticipated.

Plautus and Terence, then, for comedy, Seneca for tragedy, conditioned the classic drama of Rome. And Seneca's six tragedies are merely rhetorical; it is a question whether they were ever performed on the stage. We have the "Medea," far different from Euripides' great tragedy; "The Trojan Women" ("Troades") formed out of two of Euripides' weakest plays; "Hippolytus," also from Euripides; "Phaedra"; "Hercules Furens"; "Thebais" or the "Phoenissae." These are the great names; and they have splendid scenes, dramatic situations, powerful lines. They are the great substructures which no classic dramatist ever dared to neglect. Yet it is strange that not a single one of the *praetextae*, or *togatae*—the genuine Roman plays—have been preserved. They were so called from the conventional dress worn by the actors. There were four or five other technical sub-divisions, all named from the dress, according as they depicted the manners

and customs of the various classes. Thus all the comedies of Plautus and Terence were called *palliatae*, because, being based on the Greek new comedy, they were cast as if in Greek cities and the actors wore the pallium or Greek cloak.* Each different type wore its conventional garb. The old man was dressed in white. Slaves had a short, coarse mantle. The three different kinds of parasites wound the pallium round the body in a peculiar manner. Thus *Euclio*, the miser, robbed, like *Shylock*, of his treasure by his only daughter; *Tranio*, the villainous servant; *Grumio*, the trusty but awkward clown from the country; *Ergasilus*, the parasite; and hosts of other types passed across the stage and were projected through the ages.

The verse of the Latin play was imitated from the Greek trimeter, but had not the elasticity or power of its prototype. It is generally called the *senarius*, which simply means six-footed. The curtain, *aulaeum*, was of tapestry woven with figures; it was let down at

*In the same way in Florence in the sixteenth century, besides the *sacra rappresentazione* and the *farsa*, they had the different types of comedy called *classica, togata erudita, osservata.*

the beginning and raised at the end of the play.*

In the early days of Rome, down till late into the Republic, the people listened standing, as they did in the tavern plays in England when the auditorium was called the pit. It would have been regarded as effeminate to sit. The orchestra of the Greek theatre, as in the Latin, was devoted to places for the senators. Attempts to provide seats were forbidden by the Senate. Nothing but temporary wooden theatres with wooden seats were allowed till the middle of the first century B. C. It did not necessarily mean that the actors were also wooden. The chorus was placed on the stage itself and its rôle was degraded to merely statistical or narrative recitation, with *tiba* accompaniment — something like the choruses in the early Italian opera texts. In one cast of a play, entitled "Clytemnestra," six hundred mules are said to have appeared at once, which led a learned German to remark that it was the strongest cast on record.

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* The stage manager was called *dux* or *dominus gregis;* leader or lord of the flock. There was a regularly organized claque called *conquisitores:* an official called *praeco* compelled the audience to attention. Entrance to all but slaves was free, but visitors had to show their *tessera* or seat-check.

Scipio Nascica induced the Senate to pull down a half finished stone theatre begun by the Censor Caius Cassius Longinus 154 B. C., and sell the materials.

Pompey the Great built the first permanent stone theatre, about a hundred years later. Even he had to make use of a pious fraud to cover the real intention of the stone seats. The enormous size of those early theatres rendered accidents extremely frequent and the duration of the custom of allowing only wooden ones is a curious phenomenon.

Not until the time of Caligula were cushions allowed. Catulus was the first to protect the auditorium from the weather. Lentulus spread awnings of fine Spanish flax, called *corbasina vela*.

The stage (*pulpitum*) was lower than in the Attic theatre. The *scena* was at first simple and unadorned. Claudius Pulcher, whose very name signifies the beautiful, first decorated the stage with paintings; afterward enormous amounts were expended for silver, gold, ivory and precious marbles. Wealthy Romans who did not dare to employ marble in their own houses lavished it on temporary places of amusement for the people. Æmilius Scaurus

built a theatre, the *scena* of which had three stories, the lowest decorated with marble monoliths thirty-eight feet high; the second with marvellous glass mosaics, glass being then more precious than silver; the third with costly gilded pillars. The *cavea*, or auditorium, held eighty thousand spectators. When Scaurus' splendid Tusculan villa was set on fire by his slaves the temporary accessories taken to it from the theatre—easel pictures, stage dresses, ornaments—destroyed were reckoned at three hundred millions sesterces or fifteen million dollars.

It was only a step from this temporary magnificence to permanent splendour. The remains of Pompey's theatre and porticos for centuries fed the Roman lime-kilns; the fifty monolithic columns of gray and red Egyptian granite from it afterward adorned the basilica of San Lorenzo, thus illustrating once more the close connection between Church and stage. They now form the *cortile* of the splendid palace built by the famous architect Bramonte, of Urbino, for Cardinal Rafaelle Riario at the end of the fifteenth century.*

* Cardinal Riario was a great patron of the drama and had Latin plays performed in the great hall of his palace.

This utilisation of the glories of pagan Rome seems to be typical: a few mutilated relics which give a hint of what they might have been and a whole world of fragments used over and over again in church and palace and wall. So out of the splendid drama of three or four hundred years, in which a Roscius shone, scarce three dozen mutilated plays are left, and those appear again and again in every dramatic literature of Europe. There is nothing new under the sun. Horace in his day stood in the forum and watched the marionettes, which he speaks of as the *mobile lignum* with its cords or strings pulled from behind—*nervis alienis*. The Punch and Judy, as we call it in its simpler English form is a survival of religion and the devil of the miracle play masquerades in the redoubtable Gigi. But back of the mediæval devil is the evil or mischievous *lar* or genius which the Latin peasant feared and worshipped.

Like trees that have their leafage, flowering and harvest, and the fall and decay of the fruit, are phases of literature. The Elizabethan drama lasted only fifty years or so—Puritanism, like a hoar frost, killed it.

So the Latin drama came to its autumn. Salvianus declared that Roman society died laughing. Wealth brought universal corruption. The Emperors, many of them parvenus and sensitive to their imperfections of birth and training, were suspicious. Caligula himself touched the torch to the living pyre of a poet declared guilty of offending the sacred majesty. A strict censorship is like an atmosphere of azote—it kills all living things.

The influx of foreigners into Rome was corrupting the language. The ancient culture and polish, Greek though it was, was growing obscured by imported barbarism; the fine old drama was rapidly degenerating into merely spectacular pantomime.

When Christianity conquered Rome, or, according to the quaint legend of the Italian peasants, when St. Peter found that the keys of heaven fitted the gates of Rome and took possession in spite of the Podestà, the prevailing corruption of the drama attracted the reprobation of the Church Fathers. St. Clement called the theatre the chair of pestilence; to St. Gregory it was the school of impurity; to St. Basil, the workshop of lasciviousness and

the cavern of the devil; to St. Chrysostom, the fountain of evil and the academy of incontinence. While statues of saints decorated churches, the pagan rites seemed to hold a spell over the amusements of the people. Scenic games were under the auspices of Bacchus, Mercury governed the gymnasia, Venus the theatres, Mars the arena, which led St. Augustine to declare that the theatres were instituted by the diabolical divinities of paganism.

By the end of the fourth century the African Church called upon the Emperors Theodosius and Valentinianus to inhibit games and spectacles on Sundays and other feast days, because people would flock to the theatres rather than to the divine services.

But then, as now, the attack of the Church against the stage was idle, because it was an attack upon one of the strongest demands of human nature. The Church yielded and henceforth guided. Just as she took the heathen festivals and baptised them and utilised their observances, so the games and scenic representations which celebrated the old Saturnalia, were kept up in the carnival time which was the Bacchic and Dionysiac festival Christianised.

The priests found that they could reach the masses through the eye more easily than through the ear, and hence the churches or the *plazas* in front of the churches were furnished with extemporised stages, and dramas from the Old Testaments, from the Gospels and from the sacred legends of apostles, martyrs, founders of the holy orders were represented there.

Some of them were written after the style of the Greek drama with protagonist, deuteragonist, chorus, etc. These in Ignatius' "Adam" of the ninth century were God and the serpent. Such also was "Christus Patiens" which had chorus, semi-chorus and pantomime. Mary here appears with the characteristics of a pagan woman and declaims, like Hecuba or Medea. It is sacred only in argument. It is said to contain 1263 lines stolen bravely from Euripides.

The Italian sacred drama, or as it is called *sacra rappresentazione*, precisely corresponded to the miracles and moralities of other European countries and the same subjects were chosen: Cain and Abel, Abraham and Isaac, Abraham and Hagar, Haman, Queen Esther, Moses, Nebuchadnezzar, the Angel Raphael and

Tobias, Solomon, Samson, Saul, the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Presentation in the Temple, St. John the Baptist, the Last Supper, the Passion, the Resurrection. One finds precisely the same mixture of reverent and irreverent treatment, the same comic element furnished by the devil and the little devils.

I should not justify the amount of time already spent on the early Latin drama, if it were not evident that the Latin tongue and the Latin poets, epic, lyric and dramatic were always regarded as national to Italy: as the phenomena of an early period of their literature.

Just as in the days of Plautus, as in the days of Cicero, pure Latin as we now know it, flourished side by side with the *lingua rustica*, so up to the present—one might almost say—Latin and the *volgare illustre*, as Dante calls his vernacular, have flowed, like the Rhône and the Saône, unmixed and unmingling.

After the seventh century Latin as a spoken language among the people began to decline. The oldest monument of Italian is said to be a manuscript of the year 960, but there were a number of dialects all more or less founded

on the ancient *lingua rustica*.* It was the boast of the Archbishop Christian of Mayence that he could speak Latin, Roman, French, Greek, Apulean, Lombard and Brabant as perfectly as his mother tongue. It has been remarked that the Italian has no traces of the old languages—Sabellian, Volscian, Oscan, Etruscan—while the various dialects abound in Keltic, German, Greek, Arabian, French and Spanish words. There is a philosophical reason for this—geographical situation and trade. The pure Italian sprang from the middle provinces, which had least connection with foreign countries.

Tuscany was a mountainous country and isolated; it was the ancient source of art, and here arose the mystic St. Francis da Assisi, the spiritual Bonaventura, the fanatical Laudesi, the wonderful Catarina da Siena, the artist

* As Latin declined the *lingua rustica*, a sort of native Volap k spread among all the former provinces of the Empire, beginning first at places most remote from Rome : the Romanic language or Romance grew into Provençal, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and finally Italian. The Provençal became the first of the Literary languages and its noble array of Poets or Troubadours, as it were, laid down the laws for European lyric poetry not only in France but in remote Iceland. The lyrical or epic influence of these writers was first felt in Florence, and Dante was its most perfect flower. Dante wrote no plays, but the influence of his verse is frequently visible in the language and thought of the sacred dramas of the Florentines.

Rafael, Giotto and others. And here was the real home of the *sacra rappresentazione* in the Italian tongue, in the noble Tuscan.* These mysteries were composed by lords and ladies—not the least celebrated was Lucrezia Tornabuoni de' Medici, mother of Lorenzo, the Magnificent.

The churchmen still clung to Latin. Cardinal Bembo advised Ariosto to write in Latin. Dante used the *volgare* with some hesitation. Petrarca composed his letters and many of his poems in Latin. Cardinal Rafaello Riario had Latin plays at his palace. Pomponio Leto had a troupe of disciples called Pompomancii who in the fifteenth century played the "Asinaria" of Plautus and the "Hippolytus" of Seneca in the Quirinal, and even in the Vatican. Cardinal Pietro Riario, in 1473, brought a troupe of Florentine actors who played a Passion in Latin hexameters.

It would be impossible to enumerate a tenth of the Latin plays, ancient and mediæval, that

* The *sacra rappresentazione* corresponds to the Miracle-plays in England, to the *Geistliche Schauspiele* in Germany, to the Auto Sacramental in Spain and to the Mysteries in France. One of the earliest known was "la Rappresentazione di Nostro Signore Gesù Cristo," at Padua, in 1242 or 1243.

were given under the patronage of Sixtus IV., Alexander VI., Julius II., Leo X. and the other art-loving Popes. It is sufficient for us to remember that the spirit of the Renascence kept the popular drama in the background for many years. The Inquisition stood with drawn sword, as it were, challenging everything that was not provided with the countersign of classic antiquity.

The history of the sacred drama (called in Italy *storia*, *festa*, *misterio*, *vangelo*, *figura*, *esempio*, *esemplo*, etc.) is not so tame and monotonous as it might be thought. Besides the various biblical or traditional characters and the appropriate allowance of dignified angels and comic devils, there were introduced, according to circumstances, priests and courtiers, royal counsellors and astrologers, doctors and judges, bandits and cavaliers, merchants and soldiers.

These characters inclined to assume a fixed type. Thus the soldier was always represented as boastful and vainglorious, given to wine and gambling and every form of vice, quite like his great prototype the *miles gloriosus* of Plautus.

In Florence, where literary Italian had Dante,

Petrarca and Boccaccio to condition its perfection, the *sacra rappresentazione* came nearest to the drama of art. There were numerous imitations, but Florence and "the small but glorious Tuscan commune" best deserves study and affords the richest store of materials.

St. John was the patron saint of Florence and out of the celebrations of this munificent patron grew the splendour of the theatrical pageants. The beginning of it may be seen as far back as 1283, when the chronicles relate how "the city being in a good and happy state of repose and tranquil and pacific and convenable for merchants and artisans," a company and brigade of one thousand men and more, under a leader, called the *signore dell' amore*, marched through the city, all clad in white robes, with trumpets and other musical instruments and celebrated the day with dancing and dinners and other entertainments.

Fifty years later, in 1333, the celebration was still more brilliant. Two brigades of artists (*brigade d'artiste*), one clad in white, the other in yellow, solemnly celebrated the happy season. The *giuochi e sollazzi* lasted a whole month.

The sacred drama, which, as I said, gradu-

ally came to the level of *dramma d'arte* was performed at first by private individuals. Thus the morality entitled "Gelosia," by il Lasca, was put on the *zafaldo*, scaffold or stage, by a company of young nobles, who, if one can tell by the prologue, were all friends or relatives of the audience, all enamoured of beauty, of uprightness, of grace, of praiseworthy manners and virtuous customs. Afterward regular companies were formed, which took their names from their saints or the churches under whose auspices they acted.

The most famous was that called *Del Vangelo*, or from their seal, an eagle, *Aquilini*, which early in the fifteenth century recited or sang the "San Giovanni e Paulo" of Lorenzo the Magnificent and perpetuated itself to the end of the last century.

In 1773 the Teatro del Vangelista was occupied by the Academici Aquiloni. It was said of Lorenzo (by the way) that Terence and Plautus poured their muses into his intellect, as Neptune pours into the ground the rains of spring and summer.

The sacred drama always began with an *annunziazione*, or prologue, spoken by an angel,

and ended with a *licenza*, or epilogue, meant to disarm malevolent criticism by acknowledging all possible faults.

The actors at first were young boys, technically called *voci* or voices. Their director was called *festajolo*.

It is a question whether women and girls were at first privileged to be present as spectators. The custom undoubtedly varied in different parts of Italy. It was on the increase in the sixteenth century as is proved by the addresses to the *donne* in the prologues. The presence of actresses on the stage also was allowed at very widely different epochs. The names of La Flaminia, Polonia Zuccati, Isabella Andreini and Maria Malloni have come down from the Florence of the sixteenth century. In Rome even at the end of the last century the appearance of a woman on the stage was regarded as scandalous.

In Sicily and Calabria and other remote parts of Italy the sacred drama is still performed on festival days; so that it may be said to belong to the modern stage, like the Passion Play of Oberammergau. A certain form of it only recently ceased in Rome itself, in the chapel of the cemetery of the hospital of San Giovanni

for instance, in the Christmas and Epiphany representations in the church of Sant' Andrea della Valle. Now they appear only in a form of plastic art, mute and painted. But there are preserved examples of genuine dramatic art composed by the Jesuits, called *pastoraline* or *rappresentazioni drammatiche boschereccie*, where the different animals come to the manger of the infant Jesus and praise Him; the lambs and sheep sing be'-be'-be', the colt whinnies hi-hi-hi, *il bel canino* barks bau-bau-boo, the calf bellows mu-mu-muha, the frog croaks quoà-quoà-quoà, the cats mew and all the domestic fowls and the birds of the forest express themselves in the same graphic but ridiculous way. To such a form did the sacred drama sink while its best form was being gradually usurped by the profane drama.

It has been well said that "the men of the *cinque cento* found themselves in the personages of the ancient comedy for the very reason that Italian society had gone back to the polished and splendid corruption of paganism and the Empire." D'Ancona says, "In an age that witnessed and supported with serious scandal Alexander VI. and Lodovico il Moro,

that burnt Savanarola and deified Pietro Aretino, the sacred spectacles of the Christian Liturgy were no longer acceptable and therefore their places were taken by such comedies as "La Mandragora" and "La Calandra," which by their novelty and perfection corresponded to the artistic exquisiteness of that century."

I have not attempted to go into all the manifestations of the dramatic spirit nor mentioned every form even of the sacred drama. I have not attempted to describe the *farsi spirituali* or the *atti recitabili* which were branches of the *sacra rappresentazione*. It is enough for the present to notice that there has hitherto been a certain unity in all the diversity at which I have attempted to hint. First the continuous influence of the classic Latin drama which caused the comedies of Terence and Plautus to hold the stage down to the time of Machiavelli; which, secondly, caused almost every writer of plays, sacred and profane, to go back for his models to these two dozen plays. "We cannot do any beautiful work," says Ercole Bentivoglio, in the prologue to "I Fantasmi," "without taking antiquity for our mirror." Church and fashion alike frowned on the less

conventional but more promising popular drama and kept it down for many lustrums.

But the change came — there were brilliant writers. Yet, who in the whole list of the dramatic poets of the *cinque cento* had a talent equal to Machiavelli, whose "Mandragora" places him, in the eyes of the Italians, on a level with Molière and Aristophanes? Not one.

It was impossible wholly to smother the *commedie dell' arte*, as the popular comedy was called. It was too deeply rooted in the very nature of the people. It went back to the Atellan comedy of the Romans — even the name Zanni — our Zany — goes back to the typical Sannio of the Latin popular comedy. The deceived father, the rascally son, the clever, tricky servant are all typical: the father came to be a merchant of Venice; Pantaleone or a doctor of Laws from Bologna; Gratiano, the servant lads from Bergamo. These four persons gave hints to Molière and Shakespeare.

Fully to follow the rise of the modern drama in Italy is an almost endless task. We stand as it were in a great *plaza* to which we have been led by one of the great Roman roads. From this *plaza* open a dozen wider and ever

wider roads, each of which offers boundless fields for study.

The breaking up of Italy into almost innumerable republics, dukedoms and principalities, each with its, to a certain extent isolated, civilisation, each with its own private history, its own court and its own stage, renders the story of Italian literature, and particularly of the drama, most complicated. Florence alone would fill a volume, for here was the great centre of cultivation represented by the Medici. Ferrara, Padua, Venice, Urbino, Naples, Milan and a dozen other capitals have their own history. Merely to read over the names of the comedy writers of the sixteenth century — Dovizio, known as Cardinal Bibbiena, Ariosto, Bentivoglio, Alamanni, Benedetto Barchi, Lorenzo II., Battista Gilli, representatives of the *comedia erudita;* the Florentines Firenzuola, Cecchi, Francesco D'Ambra, Niccolo Lecco, Alessandro Piccolomini, Paraboscho — without attempting to mention their plays or to analyse them, is in itself tedious.

There are three centuries of pastoral dramas —or the *commedia rusticale*—the influence of which is seen in such undramatic writers as

Sir Philip Sidney, the brightest example of which is the "Pastor Fido" of Guarini. Then comes the period of theatrical reform when the French influence was paramount, at the beginning of the last century; the name here arising to prominence being that of Luigi Riccoboni, whose "Moglie Gelosa," "The Jealous Wife," and "La Sopresa d'Amore" were imitated from Molière. Girolomo Gigli followed in his footsteps, and we find him creating an Italianised Tartuffe. With Goldini, who banished harlequin or Leporello from his pieces, begins a new era of the Italian stage.

VI

GOLDONI AND ITALIAN COMEDY

I

BOCCACCIO and Petrarca almost immediately became the joint arbiters and emperors of Italian style. Any variation from their methods was a sort of treason. Every city and province in Italy had a dialect of its own but the Tuscan became the literary language *par excellence*. Dante stood a little too far aloof in thought to be generally imitated and so we find the *novellieri* of the sixteenth century imitating not only Boccaccio's language but also his involved and complicated style and his methods of thought — his cumbrous circumlocutions and rhetorical flowers; while the poets in the same way copied Petrarca's polished mannerisms, inditing sonnets to their mistress's eyebrows and exhaling more sighs than would fill a balloon. While the Italians, and indeed the whole cultured world, may well regret that an age which produced such splendours of architecture and painting should have restricted itself to

Petrarchian conventionalities of verse, it is impossible not to feel even deeper regret that an art so noble as the drama should have found so little spontaneous expression for so many years, should have followed antiquated models and be dried up, as it were, in the hot press of the classic style.

The Italians have always regarded the classic Latin writers as their own particular glory. This is a simple explanation of the phenomenon that meets us all through the Middle Ages and down into the sixteenth century — that every great Italian laid more stress upon his works in Latin than those in the vernacular. The great Italian nobles and the princely prelates of the Church had plays performed at their palaces, but there was no call for original tragedies or comedies. Indeed, original dramas in the vernacular would have been frowned upon in those courts.

It is remarkable to read in the records of the different cities how many times the comedies of Terence and Plautus were performed. In this respect they may be said to be even more modern than many that were written fifteen hundred years later. And it is not strange that

just as Petrarca and Boccaccio stamped their characteristics on lyric poetry and the *novella*, so at the time of the Renascence, when there was such a revival of classical learning, Plautus and Terence should have become the models of the comic drama. And the Miracle Play, or as it was called in Italy, *la sacra rappresentazione*, from which in other countries the national drama was logically derived, was kept so long undeveloped. In this respect the Renascence undoubtedly failed of its highest influence and effect.

At first the plays of *la sacra rappresentazione*, corresponding loosely to the English Miracle Plays and Moralities, were given in Latin and as this was the language of the Church, it gave a more solemn character to the action than would be gathered from the contents. For in Italy as elsewhere they were designed to afford the people pleasure and amusement as well as instruction: the comedy generally lay in the antics and final discomfiture of the devils and of the bad characters who fell into their clutches. The very name harlequin seems to be derived from a word signifying a little devil — hell-kin, When the Latin was replaced by the *volgare*

the jealousy of the Church authorities began to be aroused and the buffooneries and the irreverence caused by familiar treatment of Scripture themes were exiled from the churches. When this change took place it is difficult if not impossible to determine, but doubtless it varied in different parts of Italy: the orange tree bears blossoms and ripened fruit at the same time.

There are records of public festivals or *ludi* at Padua early in the thirteenth century, between 1208 and 1243 — and at Friuli about a hundred years later — 1298 – 1313; but it is not known whether they were in pantomimes or in dialogue or in a mixture of both. The natural tendency of the human mind explains the gradual introduction of popular contemporary characters into the *sacre rappresentazioni*, and most terrible or comical anachronisms resulted. The *argot* or slang of the people had an even more comic effect than usual when contrasted with the exaggerated solemnity of the Biblical characters or the Virtues personified. Strange as it may seem, a powerful impulse toward a popular drama in the language of the common people is found in that terrible manifestation of superstition which began in Perugia about

the middle of the thirteenth century and spread all over Europe. It has been treated by pictorial art in an enormous painting where the extravagances of the flagellants are shown in vivid colours. These hysterical companies of self-tormentors had their semi-dramatic and lyrical songs, called *lauda dramatica*, and from these Professor D'Ancona derives the so-called *Maggio* of the Italian peasantry.

Feo Balcari, Lorenzo the Magnificent, Bernardo Pulci and his wife, Antonia, contributed to the *sacra rappresentazione;* great artists like Il Brunelleschi and Bernardo Buontalenti, took charge of the scenic effects, which were often magnificent. Florence especially excelled in these semi-sacred entertainments and the memory of those given in 1471 by Galeazzo Maria Duke of Milan, in 1494 by Charles VIII. and in 1566 by Joanna of Austria is preserved in contemporary chronicles.

The moral teaching easily escaped when a corrupt, degenerate and luxurious class found more to interest them in sinners than in saints, when beauty ranked superior to virtue. But this was the transition step to genuine comedy.

The Italians had a certain natural artistic instinct. There was probably never played at Florence or Venice a miracle play like that acted at Bourges which occupied forty days and had several hundred actors. The Italian *trionfi* rarely exceeded one or two days; but astrologers, heretical savants, physicians, courtiers, merchants, counsellors, tavern-keepers, robbers, soldiers, servants, peasants — indeed all the types of the people — exaggerated and rendered as comical as possible by personal defects, such as humpbacks and lamenesses — were introduced for the same purpose — to raise a laugh.

So it was only a step from this *sacra rappresentazione* to a genuinely national comedy. The revival of classical learning postponed that step for centuries. The miracle play, shorn of its worldly adornment, became a monk and retired from the popular stage into the halls of the monasteries, where it dragged out a miserable existence. A relic of it survived in the pantomime and the exhibitions of Punch and Judy. Even to this day the Italian puppet-shows take on an importance which is to be met with nowhere else. The courts of the great Italian princes adopted as a sort of fad the com-

edies of the ancient Latins and from this arose the so-called *commedia erudita*. What might not such a genius as Boccaccio have done with all his sense of humour had the spirit of his age turned him to the stage instead of the boudoir! But it was largely Boccaccio himself who brought about the study and worship of classical models.

The direct influence of Plautus and Terence is thought to be first discoverable by some in the "Cassaria" and "I Suppositi" of Ariosto, by others in the "Amicizia" of Jacopo Nardi, by still others in the "Cassandra" of Cardinal Bibbiena. It is probably impossible to determine very definitely; possibly the lost comedy of Petrarca — the "Philogia" — may have been inspired by the same models. There is nothing more difficult than to award priority, especially when several claim it and the new invention is in the very air.

In Ariosto's "Cassaria," which is still read as a curiosity, if not for pleasure, there are eighteen characters and all but four are representatives of the common people—servants, ruffians, and two women. It is in fact a sort of anticipation of "La Dame aux Camélias." The action has some life and the intrigues are developed with some

artistic cleverness. Ariosto's masterpiece is "I Suppositi," which was translated into English by George Gascogne under the title "The Supposes" and acted at Gray's Inn thirty-three years after Ariosto's death in 1566 — the first English prose drama.

A young man of noble birth desiring to make his way into his lady-love's house assumes the dress of his servant; the servant passes himself off as the *padrone* and a fictitious father pretends to arrange for a marriage. Unfortunately the real father arrives upon the scene and the protests and counterclaims afford much amusement. But at last all ends happily with marriage and the recognition of a long lost son. Here though the plot is not new there is some attempt to draw the characters from real life: powers of observation are expended to some purpose: the sentimental young man, the faithful servant, the parasite, that relic of Greek days, the lusty old doctor, the good father and the enamoured maiden.

Few towns in Italy at that day had theatres but, Pope Leo X. is said to have built one on the capitol at Rome capable of holding ten thousand people and such an audience saw "I Suppositi" in 1513. The Pope sat at the entrance to the

gallery leading into the theatre and gave his benediction to those whom he thought worthy of listening to the polished obscenities of the play. Rafael painted the scenery. The ambassadors of foreign countries were scandalised at seeing the Pope seated eye-glass in hand listening and laughing at the equivocal jests.

Ariosto, called the Divine, the popular poet of the Orlando, wrote several other comedies and left one unfinished — the "Scolastica," the scene of which is laid in his own home-town, Ferrara. The heroes, Claudio and Eurialo, are young law-students who are in love and are anxious to conceal that fact from their respective sires. Eurialo's *innamorata*, at the end proves to be his father's lost ward: so his objection vanishes and with good reason: through the father's broken faith the girl had been reduced to poverty and servitude and the son's disobedience is a suitable punishment. This sounds like a variation of one of the comedies of Terence. But here the characters are admirably original and admirably contrasted: the best is Bonifazio the lodging-house-keeper who declares that he likes to help the young student, is willing to tell a dozen lies to keep the lady on

good terms with his father, "for verily to help a poor lover doth not appear to me a servile task but rather the duty of a gentle spirit." Nothing gives a better idea of the need of the Reformation than the satiric element of this play: as for example in the scene between the conscience-burdened father, Bartolo, and the friar who tells him that his sin can be commuted for some pious work; there is no duty or law in the world so powerful, he says, that it cannot be relaxed with alms.

Unfortunately for the dramatic art the corruption that reigned throughout Italy like a growth of poisonous weeds in a tropical jungle made itself especially felt in the domain of comedy. No situation was too gross, no dialogue too unseemly for the taste of an aristocracy boasting itself guilty of all the cardinal sins. Almost the first of these comedies of mingled gold and ordure is attributed to a cardinal of the Apostolic Church.

Barnardo Dovizio — who had vice in his very name — was born at Bibbiena in 1470. He received the scarlet *baretta* of cardinal in 1513 from his master Giovanni de' Medici. The "Calandria" was first performed about five years before he became cardinal and its imme-

diate success was attributed to its ingenious union of the humour of Boccaccio with the plot of Plautus: in other words he adapted Boccaccio to the classic stage. The title is derived from the character Calandro, a simpleton, as the names implies. It is a frank variation of the "Menaechmi." The "Menaechmi" itself was given in Ferrara in 1486 at a cost of 1,000 ducats; two years later it was performed at Florence by the pupils of Paolo Comparini, who wrote a prologue to it, and again, in 1502, on the occasion of Lucrezia Borgia's espousal to the Duke of Ferrara. The prose prologue, while confessing the plagiarism, defends it. "If any one should say the author is a great robber of Plautus, let us assert on the other hand that Plautus well deserves being robbed, for being such a blockhead [*moccicone*] as to leave his things unlocked and unguarded in the world."

Plautus, as we well know, was equally unscrupulous in despoiling the Greek Menander, and we do not think the less of Shakespeare because he despoiled the unknown author of the "Comedy of Errors," which is based upon the same original.

Cardinal Bibbiena at least gave new names

to old types, and the contrast between the astute Fessenio and the numbskull Calandro is extremely comical, especially where Calandro is persuaded to get into the coffer and when afterward the *sbirri* — the constables — shut up the coffer and Calandro perceives that they are going to fling him into the river. The comic element furnished by Lidio and Santilla, the twins so alike that the servant cannot tell which is the real lover of her mistress, is of course familiar to us both on the stage and also, we might say, in real life. This play was performed with great splendour of scenery and costume at Urbino: with masques, morris-dances, and conceits of stringed instruments. Leo X. in 1514, produced it on his private stage at the Vatican to entertain the Marchioness Isabella of Mantua.

The name of Machiavelli is better known in politics than in literature, and owing to his advocacy of unscrupulous methods has assumed a sinister meaning. As Voltaire put it, a man who would ruin a neighbour lest he himself should be ruined and assassinate a friend lest the friend should grow strong enough to kill him would be said to be carried away by the grand principles of Machiavellianism.

But Machiavelli exerted a great influence as a playwright. Four comedies are attributed to him. Two of these are regarded as doubtful, the other two are the "Clizia," which is partially imitated from the "Casina" of Plautus and the "Mandragora" or "Mandragola," "Mandrake," so called from the drug, mandrake, which plays such an important function in the play. Both of them were written in the full maturity of Machiavelli's powers but after he had fallen from his high estate. They are the work of a disappointed man and if they stood alone it might be reasonably conjectured that they misrepresented the condition of the society which they depict and satirise. But the fact remains that the horrible pictures of depravity which these plays present and which render it impossible to analyse them are only an echo of a state of morals constantly growing more and more corrupt and rotten.

The courts of the princes and of the Popes being utterly demoralised, the clergy contaminated with the worst vices, family life vitiated by the influence of the nobles and the priests, naturally enough the stream could not go above its source: there was no general public

to demand great things of those that purveyed their amusement. Consequently we find these horribly immoral plays of Bibbiena and Machiavelli, sparkling as they are with the keenest wit, constructed with abundant skill, presenting wonderfully vivid types of a society happily now no more (we should hope!) and echoed for a century literally by thousands, built on the same models, illustrating countless phases of real life, furnishing the playwrights of France and England with multitudes of brilliant scenes, borrowed and stolen and now buried and mostly forgotten.

Nothing in the world is sadder than to contemplate a civilisation, brilliant and capable of splendid works of art going to decay. Italy dismembered, robbed of the heritage of its freedom, crushed by the Inquisition, lay like a goddess blinded and flung upon a filthy dungheap. Even when the road seemed open to great things there was no leader to bring the art to triumph.

Had Aretino possessed the genius he might possibly have entirely freed the Italian stage from the so-called Latinising tendencies. He took bold steps in this direction. The traditions of the classic drama forbade more than

a certain number of characters on the stage at the same time, nor allowed the same person to enter more than a certain number of times in one piece.* He says in his prologue to "La Cortigiana," "If you behold the personages come upon the scene more than five times, do not laugh;" and in still another prologue, that to "Orazia," he refuses to copy the style of Petrarca and Boccaccio — not through ignorance, he says, because he knows what they are. "I laugh at the pedants," he adds, "who conceive that learning consists in the Greek language, placing all their repute in the bus and the bas of the grammar." If he had been a Shakespeare or even a Machiavelli he might have taken the Italian *farsa*, and lifted it to the level of a national drama.

Gianmaria Cecchi, the most prolific of the writers of the sixteenth century says in his prologue to his "Romanesca" that the *farsa* stands between tragedy and comedy, enjoying the liberties of both and shunning their limitations, for it receives into its ample boundaries great

* "Mandragora" has only eight *dramatis personæ*, "La Cortigiana" has twenty-four. His *Ipocrito* anticipates Moliere's Tartaffe: *chi non sa fingere non sa vivere.*

lords and princes, which comedy does not, and, like a hospital or inn, welcomes the vilest and the most plebeian of the people to whom Dame Tragedy has never deigned to stoop. It accepts all subjects — grave and gay, profane and sacred, urbane and rude, sad and pleasant. The scene may be laid in a church or a public square, wherever you please; and if one day is not long enough, two or three may be employed. This modern mistress of the stage is the most amusing, the most appropriate, the sweetest, prettiest country lass—*foresozza* — to be found on earth.

It will be noticed that he calls the *farsa* the modern mistress of the stage. If modern she had a long ancestry and if not so distinguished as that of the *commedia erudita*, it probably went even farther back, into the most ancient times. For, as one must constantly remember, the Latin stage as represented by Seneca, Plautus and Terence, was only a variation of the Greek originals, while the genuine Latin plays of native origin, whether tragic or historic or comic, were largely improvisations and therefore perished utterly. Only their spirit remained and informed the *sacra rappresentazione*.

Cecchi did away with the unities and the old traditions that a comedy must be in five acts; he freely introduced the dialect speech of the common people and both in his dialogue and in his rapidity of composition he seems to have been very much like Goldoni. He declared in the prologue to "Le Maschere" that he never spent more than ten days on any one of his comedies.

Unfortunately for Italy there was no demand for the elaboration of the *farsa* and so she had to wait for two hundred years before she was emancipated from the tyranny of the unities. Symonds says: "Society was in dissolution and men lived for the moment careless of consequences. The immorality of the theatre was at once a sign and a source of this corruption."

"Oh times! Oh manners!" exclaims Lelius Giraldus, "the obscenities of the stage return in all their foulness. Plays are acted in every city which the common consent of Christendom had banned because of their depravity. Now the very prelates of the Faith, our nobles, our princes, bring them back again among us and cause them to be publicly presented. Nay, priests themselves are eagerly ambitious of the infamous title of actors, in order to bring them-

selves into notoriety and to enrich themselves with benefices."

One more paragraph from Symonds is apropos: "It must not be supposed that the immorality of the comic stage consists in the licence of language, incident or plot. Had this been all, we should hardly be justified in drawing a distinction between the Italians of the Renascence and our own Elizabethan playwrights. It lies far deeper — in the vicious philosophy of life, paraded by the authors in the absence of any didactic or satirical aim. Molière, while exposing evil, teaches by example. A canon of goodness is implied, from which the deformity of sin and folly are deflections. But Machiavelli and Aretino paint humanity as simply bad. The palm of success is awarded to unscrupulous villainy. An incapacity for understanding the immutable power of moral beauty was the main disease of Italy. If we seek the cause of this internal cancer, we must trace the history of Italian thought and feeling back to the age of Boccaccio; and we shall probably form an opinion that misdirected humanism blinded with the impieties of a secularised papacy, the self-indulgence of the

despots and the coarse tastes of the bourgeoisie had sapped the conscience of society."

I ought to mention with a word the comedies of Anton Francesco Grazzini. He was generally called *Il Lasca*, the roach, referring to the fish of the Cyprinidæ or carp family, which has enriched the language with the saying "sound as a roach." He was born in Florence in 1503 and had a varied career as druggist, philosopher astronomer, philologist, *novelliero*, *improvvisatore*, humourist and playwright. He belonged to the Academies of *Gli Umidi* and *la Crusca* but quarreled with them both. He died at the age of eighty. He detested pedants, priests, *Petrarchisti* and *Boccaccevoli* and was always ready to turn anything and everything into ridicule. He had little invention, but the Florentines of his day were pleased with practical jokes, and so his novels and comedies alike turn on *beffe* and *burle*. He himself calls them —"Comedies cheap, small, and here and there filled out with plagiarisms [*Commedie stiracchiate, grette e rubacchiate quà e là*]—and worse than all mixing together the old and the new,the ancient and the modern and making *un guazzabuglio*—a hodgepodge — and medley that has no method or turn or head or tail."

"Comedies," he says in another place, "must be jolly, capricious, witty, absurd [*ridicola*], fine [*balla*] and well recited."

But he also lacked the genius to put comedy on the right track and his best known play, "Gelosia," has little originality but only practical jokes in the farcical style so familiar. There is some fun in his posthumous comedy, "Arzigogolo," "Sly Fellow," where an old man is represented as willing to give his soul to become young again and when he actually attains his wishes by means of his hard cash, he is so maltreated by his lady-love that he is glad to pay a still larger sum to change back to an old man.

It is curious to see how the old types appear in many of these comedies. Thus the *miles gloriosus*, the braggart coward, turns up under different names — Bisilisco, Gorgoleone, Frasilogo, Parabola, Martibellonio, Dragoleone, Trasimaco. So also the parasite, that type so loved by the ancients, masquerades as Lupo, Panvinio, Leccardo, Polifago, Mastica, Ventraccio, Morfeo, Lardone, Panfago, Fagone, Gulone — the different names, as in the Greek and Latin prototypes, nearly all having a slant at the creature's unlimited appetite.

Camerini sees in the Neapolitan G. B. Porta, who died at the age of seventy-seven, in 1615, one of the predecessors of Goldoni. One of his comedies, "La Chiappenaria," presents the great captain Gorgoleone, conqueror of lions and giants, but though a terrible boaster, at heart, like all his breed, an arrant coward. To hear him tell his feats one gets a vision of arms, legs, heads and other fragments of people flying through the air; but, like the prowess of the immortal Tartarin of Tarascon, it is only words: if a case of real danger should occur, he would be the first to take to his heels, followed by his squire, Rompiguerra.

The squire is a distant congener of Sancho Panza and while he flatters his patron he makes sport of him. Old Cogliandro, the father of the heroine Drusilla, into whose house the lover, Albinio, penetrates disguised under a bear-skin—whence the name of the play is derived — is the familiar type of the old fool, deceived by every one. Here, as usual, enters the parasite Panvinio, whose very name, derived from *pan* and *vino*, signifies that he thinks of nothing but bread and wine. The cant-term *Scanna-ministre* is applied to him in honour of his digestive

powers: he would devour not only everything on the map but also the map itself. In his zeal for the pleasures of the palate he calls a handsome capon the *Padre abate dei Cappone* and describes an *olla podrida* in Spanish style with all the flowery diction that a critic would apply to the Last Judgment of Michelangelo. His terms of endearment are all derived from the pantry. He helps to introduce Alberino into Cogliandro's house. "Soldiers," he says, "go to war for three ducats a month amid musket balls and cannon balls and shall I fear death when I have a chance to eat and drink well and sleep better?" He becomes the leader in the formidable undertaking and his superior genius is recognised by the servant Truffa whom he wheedles.

What a picture Porta gives of the astuteness of the enamoured Drusilla, who, when her father has detected her furtively embracing her lover Albinio, proves to his satisfaction that he had not seen correctly, that he was suffering from obliquity of vision and as an additional proof she threatens to go to a monastery — the monastery being Albinio's house — and then she heaps on her lover all manner of insults! He

loves her more and more: — "a thousand years with her would seem to me a moment; the more I see her the more beautiful she seems."

Porta's dialogue has been compared by the Italians, in its freshness and brilliancy, to the sky of Naples. His comedies, says Ferdinando Galanti, "are pearls fallen into the mire, but they are still pearls."

II

The next two centuries are a barren waste in the history of the Italian stage. Not even the colossal genius of Michelangelo in his "Fiera," that great trilogy of twenty-five acts, succeeded in communicating any life to an art that was hopelessly set, like plaster-of-paris or putty.

The only originality that seemed to show itself in that long age of decadence was in the so-called *favola pastorale*—the pastoral drama — which is the grandmother of Italian opera. The *commedia dell' arte* was also a dramatic phase characteristic of Italy and traced its ancestry and origin back to almost prehistoric

times. Nothing is more certain than that improvisation was indigenous to Italy and the *commedia dell' arte* depended for its success upon the quick wit of the actors who, under certain conditions, within certain fixed limits, made up on the spur of the moment the dialogue and evolved the action.

A number of the skeletons of these improvised comedies have come down to us and have been recently published. Salvator Rosa as well as Cecchi planned them. Naturally caricature and broad farce and grotesque antics, adapted solely to raise a laugh, characterised these improvisations. Often in more formal comedies whole scenes were left to be filled in by the actors and this was doubtless the case in other parts of Europe; certainly it was true of the later Italian stage. There were certain jests and songs, stories and prayers, oaths and dialogues, sentences and proverbs which undoubtedly became the special property of the actor. Such especially were the *lazzi*, or jests, which Riccoboni called the inutilities that interrupted the dialogue and had nothing to do with the subject.

Harlequin had an imprescriptible right to a

large share of these absurdities; especially the *pulcinello* of the Neapolitan comedy, who was always full of amusing remarks. The topical song of the modern operetta, having absolutely no relevancy to the action but introduced as a way of conveying flat and often coarse jests at the expense of local celebrities or current "fads," perhaps as well as anything illustrates the effect of these *lazzi* which then, as now, made the judicious mourn.

Many actors won great fame in this art and it would evidently require invention, a quick and ready memory, a fiery dash, readiness of repartee and more or less grace. Sometimes women excelled in it: for example Vincenza Armani, a Venetian, who also wrote poems and was called the Queen of the Art.

There is one thing that strikes one in studying the Italian drama, and that is the permanence of types. The four most famous are Arlecchino, Brighella, Pantaleone and the Doctor. The harlequin is evidently derived from the ancient *mimi*, and may be detected in the old Greek comedy where the actor wore a goat or tiger skin with a white cap on his head, a black mask over his face and carried a stick in his

hand. Michelangelo is said to have furnished the Harlequin of his day with the mask; Domenico Biancoletti, in the seventeenth century, added the finishing touches. A whole book might be written about these four characters — yes, on Harlequin alone. In how many hundred plays he appears with his lady-love Colombina, his parti-coloured raiment and his cap ornamented with the tail of a hare or a cony— significant of his hare-brained or cowardly nature — and acted by famous actors who were rewarded by kings!

Possibly the real ancestor of the harlequin is the Maccus of the celebrated Atillan games or *ludi*. His mask was long and sharp; he had a hunchback, a protruberant belly, long legs and a most strident voice: as he imitated the sounds of various voices and especially the sharp crowing of the cock to which he bore a certain resemblance, he was called *pullus gallinaceus*, whence by an easy transition we derive *pullicenus*, *Pulicinella*, Pulcinella, Punchinello and our own Punch. So when we see the Punch and Judy show in the public square we ought to look at it with some reverence: it has a most noble and legitimate genealogy; its beginnings

are in the misty times when the Oscans and Umbrians worshipped their nature gods under the glorious sky of Italy. Perhaps it is only safe to admit with conservative caution that there are other derivations of the word Punch, Three can be found in Littré; and Skeat has still another. The last great Italian Pulcinella, Petito, King of San Carlino, died in March, 1876, on the stage dressed in his white array.

Brighella is the type of the insolent servant, chattering, cheating, malicious, quarrelsome, but easily bought. The garb which he wore also became typical: the white tunic hemmed with green, the wide-brimmed conical hat with its black plume or in later times somewhat modified; with wide trousers and a jacket trimmed with green and the white *berettone* or cap and the half-mask displaying the little moustache and the shaven chin. He has many aliases: Pedrolino, Beltrame, Bagolino, Fantino, Finocchio, Traccagnino, Frontino, Sganarello, Mascarillo and Figaro.

Pantaleone, who derived his name from Venice, whose lions were supposed to be everywhere planted by Venetian conquest —our tabooed *pants* only worn by *gents* recalls it —

represents the old father, generally rich, jovial, rather reticent, but fond of proverbs, a man of the world, with a daughter the very apple of his eye. His costume is properly that of a Venetian merchant, originally a red gown but after the Republic lost Negroponte a black one was substituted, a slouching baretta of wool, short clothes, stockings, red slippers and a black semi-mask.

Such an one is Shakespeare's Antonio, with his pretensions of being a *magnifico*, with his houses and villas and his fleets on all the seas. Being more closely drawn from the life he may be found in the drama of other countries. His dignified flowing beard is symbolical of the greatness of Venice when Milan alone paid over as a balance of trade nearly seven hundred thousand zecchins a year. There are many famous names of actors who took this typical part with distinction — a part found in more comedies than one would care to name. Garelli, known as *il eloquente;* Antonio Mattiuzzi, as famous in Paris as in Venice and commemorated by Goldoni: a man who not only acted but also wrote comedies: his own "Tre Fratelli Veneziani" was declared incomparable.

The Doctor is the type of the semi-serious *maschera:* the caricature of the learned man who is always citing famous authors and wise saws in a most authoritative tone of voice. Just as Harlequin came from Bergamo and Pantaleone from Venice came the Doctor from Bologna. Pietro Verri traces this character back only as far as the twelfth century, when the new school of jurisprudence was opened at Bologna and two celebrated doctors, Bulgaro and Martino, disputed publicly whether the whole world was a titled property or only a lease: hence the alleged appropriateness of the black nose, the blackened forehead and the red cheeks. The Doctor's name is generally Graziano, which has a familiar sound to readers of Shakespeare. He is dressed in a black robe, with a mask stained with wine-spots. Goldoni relates that this spot of wine transmits to posterity the memory of a Bolognese *giureconsulto* whose face was disfigured with a red spot: but it also hints at the convivial habits of doctors, especially the humbugs among doctors.

There are still other types of the masked comedian; one of the most famous was Scaramuccia the boastful, a cousin or even a nearer

relation of the *miles gloriosus*. Tiberio Fiorilli the favourite of Louis XIV. and no less famous as Capitan Spavento and Capitan Matamoros and also as Pulcinella, created this part. It was said of him, as the heaven has only one sun so the earth has only one Scaramouche. He finds his echo in Molière.

Scapino of Bologna, the astute rascally little *cicerone di piazza* — who now-a-days would ride round in a motor-vehicle and point out celebrities and notable buildings with a stentorian voice multiplied by a megaphone, finds his double in Molière's "Fouberies de Scapin."

Nearly every city of Italy had its own favourite type of the buffoon: Modena its Sandron; Calabria its Coviello with his mandolin — all speaking their own peculiar dialects and dressed in the typical costume. What the tourist will see even now at Venice during Carnival time was probably a more common and every-day entertainment in the time of its glory, when, as has been well said by Galanti, the city had a gay population that in itself was like a spectacle: Armenians, Turks, Hebrews, Germans, Spaniards mingling in the streets and on the Rialto with polenta-pedlars and merchants of higher

degree. The chronicles of Venice are full of descriptions of brilliant festivals which left their impress on the memory of the people. Venice was the last of the Italian republics to fall and one can hardly get an idea of the environment of Carlo Goldoni unless one remembers something of the history of the proud city of the Doges.

III

It must be made perfectly plain that the set forms to which the Italian stage was committed put a bar on any great display of originality. The upper classes who alone had any influence were content with ocular magnificence and the conventional imitative plot, provided there were vivacity of dialogue. Innovation was frowned upon just as it was in music a century later in Germany. What and who should bring about a reform?

It was a Venetian — it was Carlo Goldoni, whom Robert Browning calls "Dear King of Comedy — good gay sunniest of souls."

There is no need of saying much of his life.

When he was an old man, over eighty, he wrote his memoirs in French and they are accessible in an English translation with an Introduction by Mr. Howells; a selection of four of his plays with a brief biographical sketch by Helen Zimmern, compiled from the memoirs, was published a few years ago.

He was born February 25, 1707, in a large and beautiful mansion between the Bridge dei Nomboli and that of Donna Onesta, at the corner of the Ca Cent' Anni. A Latin inscription commemorates the fact that he was born there *plaudentibus Musis*. His grandfather, who held a position in the Venetian Chamber of Commerce, married a lady of Modena. When she died, leaving one son, he married a widow named Salvioni, who was already the mother of two daughters. The son, who became a doctor, married Margarita the elder of the stepdaughters, and the future playwright, Carlo, was thus doubly his grandparents' grandchild.

In command of large means, the grandfather expended them recklessly. Above all things he liked theatrical and musical entertainments, and he hired all the best actors and singers of his day to perform for him.

"I was born in that whirl [*questo strepito*] amid that abundance," wrote Goldoni, "could I despise stage shows, could I help loving gaiety?" He declares that he came into the world without crying! When he was four years old he began to delight in the comedies that he saw acted; at eight or nine or ten — according to different accounts — he made a little play which greatly pleased and flattered his father, who said: "If nine years produce four carats of wit, eighteen ought to give twelve and by arithmetical progression he might thus reach perfection."

When Goldoni's grandfather died and the estate was settled, the usual results of extravagance were bequeathed to the family; but his father, Giulio, rose to the occasion: he went to Perugia and there practised medicine and achieved success. One of the boy's first questions on reaching his new home was whether he should find there a theatre or hall for comedy. His parents favoured him in these tastes and when they got up some private theatricals for him he took the part of the leading lady, but afterward admitted that he would never have made a good actor, whether in male or female parts.

He was destined to be a physician, so he was sent to the Dominican school at Rimini, but he took no interest in the logic of the celebrated Candini: Plautus, Terence, Aristophanes and the fragments of Menander were far more to his taste.

A company of Venetian actors happened to be at Rimini. Goldoni was not long in scraping acquaintance with them and found their teaching of philosophy far more entertaining than what the Jesuits had to give him. When they were on the eve of leaving Rimini he determined to go with them. He took two shirts and a night-cap, gave away the rest of his wardrobe, as if he were bound for the other world (says one of his biographers) and hid in the barge which the company had hired for their journey. After it was well under way he suddenly appeared among them. What with the actors and prompter and costumer, and children of every age, and dogs, cats, monkeys, pigeons and a lamb, it reminded him of Noah's Ark.

They were three days on the way and the young man was then landed at Chioggia, where his parents were at that time living. They readily forgave him his escapade and Dr. Giulio

determined to have him study under his own eye; but the practice of medicine evidently wore on his nerves; he became moody and melancholy and so he was allowed to give up the detested career and was sent to an uncle living at Venice to study law. As there were seven theatres in full blast there and Metastasio's operas were attracting great attention, it was not strange that he got more pleasure than law. A place was obtained for him in the Collegio Ghislieri at Pavia, but as it was a Papal institute he had to submit to the tonsure and to other conventionalities. While waiting for their termination he read the dramatic library belonging to one of the professors: this gave him a great stimulus to become a dramatic author — he came to the conclusion that while one might imitate the ancients in their plots, in their style and in their precision, still it would be requisite to impart greater interest, introduce more expressive characters, cultivate a higher comic art and a more felicitous disentanglement.

Every century has its dominant genius, he said, and every region its characteristic taste. He felt that while the Greeks and Romans had known nature and followed it closely, there had

still been little illusion and craft. They had pictured it with too much realism but with too little movement, without enough plot—*intriccio*, intrigue — without enough balance and contrast of characters.

When he found the plays of English, French and Spanish authors and only here and there one by Italians, when he noticed that no real collection, no theatre, did honour to Italy, his ambition awoke and he felt in his heart that he might some day create such a *teatro Italiano* with original and veracious and vivacious action and characters copied from life.

But meantime he had become a student of the Papal College and found himself masked, as it were, in the college costume, tonsured like a priest, in a gown like a sleeveless nightgown, with a velvet stole fastened to his left shoulder by a gold and silver pin in the shape of the Ghislieri arms surmounted by a pontifical tiara and Saint Peter's keys. And his gaiety and natural good temper made him a leader in all the mischief that went on under the pious wings of that institution. He learned something of life here and the fascinations of gambling and worse vices were not concealed from his eyes.

At Chioggia, during his vacation, a priest lent him Machiavelli's "Mandragora" not dreaming that it was unsuitable reading for a youth. Goldoni read it a dozen times, not for its indecency, but because he was carried away by the great statesman's satiric and comic genius. From that moment he learned to watch and study men and to find delight in the analysis of human passions.

On his return to Pavia he wrote a kind of farce entitled "Il Colosso" which made all manner of sport of the Pavians. He was punished for it by expulsion — for that and other pranks. He schemed to go to Rome and become the pupil of Gravina, then regarded as the most learned in the dramatic art and famed as the instructor of Metastasio. "Have I not, perchance, also the disposition, talent, genius? To Rome, then, to Rome." But he had no money, So he returned to his home, was forgiven and started off on a journey with his father. Everywhere he went he gathered new ideas and experiences which he afterward embodied in his plays—as for example a little love-episode with a young maid at Friuli, who appears as Corallina and as the soubrette in "La Cameriera Astuta."

At Modena he saw a priest or abbé condemned to the pillory, and this spectacle filled his mind with a disgust of the world: he visited churches, muttered prayers, and resolved to become a Capuchin. His father consented, gave him his blessing and took him to Venice, there to fulfil his vows. But it required only about a fortnight of dinners, suppers, theatres and other dissipations with relatives and friends to make him forget the cloisters.

The theatre had given him back his life and his individuality. He tells us in his Memoirs how his mind found no other resource than the dramatic art, which he ever loved and to which he would have dedicated himself had he been master of his will.

He was twenty-one and through the good offices of friends he was appointed *aggiunto coadjutore* in the Criminal Chancelry, a position which gave him a great opportunity to study types and forms. It was not a very burdensome office and assured him good pay. At Chioggia he studied the comic types that came under his observation and were afterward immortalised by his satiric pen. At Feltre, whither his duties called him, he became acquainted with a young

lady boarding in a convent and he was just on the point of marrying her when his faithless, fickle fair one jilted him to marry an old man. Whereupon he expressed the hope that the old spouse would soon die so that he might marry the rich young *vedovella*. Many years afterward he utilised his experiences in one of his best-known comedies, "Le Barufe Chiozzote," in which Isidoro is supposed to be a picture of himself. This incident has within a few years been commemorated in a comedy entitled "Un Amoretto del Goldoni a Feltre."

At Feltre he made the acquaintance of a troupe of actors under Carlo Veronese, whom Goldoni, after a lapse of thirty years, met again in Paris when he was acting the part of Pantaleone. Florindo de' Maccheroni, whom he had known at Rimini, was also there, but he had grown old and Goldoni says he was then playing only the king in tragedy and the noble father in comedy. Again his susceptible heart was ensnared by a *bella Angelica*; she was so jealous of the actresses whom Goldoni was training in the "Didone" and "Serse" of Metastasio that she wept when she ought to have laughed, but Goldoni says the poor girl loved him tenderly and with perfect

fidelity. "I loved her too with my whole soul and I may say that she was the first person whom I ever truly loved."

He was on the point of marrying her, but it suddenly occurred to him that her beauty was too delicate in character to last and so he abandoned the delicious dream. "To be sure," he says, this was reasoning too much for a lover but either through virtue or weakness or inconstancy, I left Feltre and did not marry her."

In 1731 he lost his father, and as he was now the head of the family economical considerations compelled him to devote himself seriously to the law. He went to Padua and studied earnestly, for still Padua boasted its learned Bellario. Nevertheless, he spent the whole night before the examination for his degree at the card table and lost all his money — one of his companions was a law professor. The day began to dawn; the university bell rang: he hurriedly put on his gown and rushed to the examination, which he passed brilliantly and was proclaimed *dottore*.

The day came when he should be presented at the Palazzo: he tells how he stood for an hour and a half at the foot of the *Scala dei Giganti* making so many bows and contortions that his

back was broken and his wig was like a lion's mane. The fruit of these days was, as might be expected — not a rush of clients, but his "Avvocato Veneziano."

Another of his numerous love adventures here occurred. A mysterious woman known as Barabba, who was always looking out for the interests of young lawyers, came to him one day and engaged him in a long conversation, which he must have found very amusing; but Goldoni retained his dignity and the unknown departed saying, "*Addio, signore*, be ever wise, be ever honourable and you will be happy." Instead of occupying himself with profitable law-cases he whiled away his time in composing an almanac entitled "The Experience of the Past; the Astrolog of the Future, *Almanacco Critico* for the year 1732." The work was full of prophecies written in *terza rima*. He also composed a lyric tragedy entitled "L'Amalasunta." Still another love affair from which there was no other exit than flight brought him to Vicenza, where Count Parmenio Trissino, a descendant of the author of "Sofonisba," condescended to cast his critical eye on his latest production. He gave him no encouragement but advised him to

devote himself to comedy. At Brescia he read the tragedy to a *brigata*, but it met with more criticism than praise.

At Bergamo, the home of Harlequin, he was warmly received, his name as an astrologer having preceded him: his *almanacco* had won him friends. Then he proceeded to Milan. It was carnival time and opera was in full swing. Caffariello, the director and composer, and his wife, the *prima ballerina*, received him cordially. At their home he began to read his great tragedy, but Caffariello laughed at the Queen of the Goths; one of the singers interrupted him by practising his part at the *cembalo;* the reading was suspended and only Count Prata, one of the directors of the theatre, had the patience ultimately to hear it to the end and the grace to give the author some wise advice, which he recognised as true and, accepting, went home to carry out. First, however, he had a fire built and as before a sacred altar he read the precious play from beginning to end and though still thinking it good, nevertheless, while cursing the rules, the actors, the composers, the scene-painters and the critics, he burnt it from title to epilogue. Then he or-

dered dinner, drank enough wine to cheer his heart and forgot his disappointment and humiliation in sleep.

The Venetian ambassador gave him a sinecure office as chamberlain and while enjoying its emoluments and plenty of time, he made the acquaintance of a quack by the name of Buonafede Vitali, called Anonimo, a Jesuit, doctor, professor, orator, encyclopedist, who as a means of attracting customers acted a sort of farce in public and kept a company of comedians in his service.

Owing to the unexpected failure of certain comedians to keep their engagement for the Easter season, a vacancy occurred at the Milan theatre and Anonimo proposed that his company should fill the bill. Goldoni supported his proposition; Rubini, a famous Pantaleone, was engaged and Goldoni wrote an intermezzo for two voices, entitled "Il Gondolier Veneziano." It made a hit. This then was his first work to be performed and it was afterward published in the fourth volume of the Pasquali edition of Venice.

Shortly after this a play called "Belisario" was performed in Milan, in which the blinded hero was led on the stage by Arlecchino who to

show his compassion kept beating him with his stick. The whole affair was perfectly farcical yet it was received by the public quite seriously. Goldoni asked the chief actor what he thought of it. The man replied that that sort of thing would go on until the stage was reformed.

Goldoni was moved to write a play in which this subject should be treated worthily. He got one act completed, but the war of Don Carlos broke out (in 1733). Goldoni had to leave Milan; at Crema several scrapes into which he was led lost him his patron's confidence and his position. But he finished "Belisario" and after some delay it was produced at Verona with great success. He wrote:

> My heroes were men and not demigods; their passions were proportioned to their positions, showing them to be human, and not carrying their vices and virtues to an imaginary excess. My style was not elegant and my versification never touched the sublime: and that is precisely why it was needed to bring to reason a public accustomed to hyperbole, to antitheses, and to the absurdity of the gigantic and of the romances.

In 1736 Goldoni married Nicoletta Conio, who, he declared, indemnified him for all that he ever suffered from the evil done him by women and reconciled him to the fair sex. She was a true

companion to him all the days of his life, his inspiration and his comfort, unspoiled by success and serene in adversity, free from jealousy — the ideal wife for such a man, keeping him to high purposes and restraining his lower impulses. He often declared that in his wife he was the most contented, the happiest man in the world.

The story of the steps by which he was led to abandon the composition of conventional tragedies, *intermezzi*, *cantabili* and Metastasian opera librettos is fully rehearsed in his Memoirs as likewise his entertaining adventures in the various cities to which his nomadic instincts led him. Indeed the Memoirs of his are justly regarded as amusing as any of his comedies*.

Garrulous, simple-hearted, confiding, if he had only written them in Italian instead of French, they would have perhaps excelled any autobiography in existence.

After he had written a number of comedies in accord with the ancient fashion, all more or less successful in their way but not satisfying to

* There are thirty or more titles of his early tragedies, tragi-comedies, *drammi per musica*, comedies of *semi-carattere* and masked subject-comedies.

his artistic instincts, he began his first reform by trying to abolish the masks that were one of the conventions of the Italian stage. At Pisa, at Mantua, at Modena and finally at Venice (in July, 1747), with the aid of Medebac, leader of a troupe of comedians, of which Medebac's beautiful wife, and the famous Darbes were important members, he began to introduce his new ideas. Venice especially was the home of the Italian theatre and here he saw a suitable place to build his new edifice. "I had no rivals to combat," he said, "but only to overcome prejudices."

The rivals however were not slow to appear. He entirely abandoned his law business, which was always rather a form than a chosen profession. His first new comedy, "Tognetto," made a fiasco. He thought the matter ended and came to the conclusion that the public was right in condemning it. He wrote another, "L'Uomo Prudente," in which the Pantaleone appears at first in a mask and then removes it. Though very faulty the play was successful and he was soon ready with a third, "Due Gemelli Veneziani" especially adapted for displaying the genius of Darbes who took the part of the twin brothers.

But these were only tentative. Not until 1748, when his "Vedova Scaltra," "The Crafty Widow," was represented at Venice may he be said to have definitely abandoned himself to the "Comedy of Character," in which he was thought to rival Molière. In "La Vedova Scaltra" he introduces Milord Rosenif, an Englishman; Chevalier Le Bleau, a Frenchman; Don Alvaro, a proud Spaniard; il Conte di Borco, an Italian; and the liberal, elegant, noble, love-compelling heroine Rosaura, who receives with perfect impartiality a diamond from the Englishman, a picture from the Frenchman, a genealogical tree from the Don and a sentimental letter from the Italian. It was represented thirty times. Another of his comedies, "La Erede Fortunata," having, as he thought, been unjustly condemned during the carnival of 1749, he vowed to write sixteen the next year and he accomplished his purpose — a literary feat never since exceeded even by Mr. Clyde Fitch! Among the number were "Pamela," a dramatisation of Richardson's novel, then all the rage in Italy, and the "Bottega del Caffè."

The use of the comedy as a censor of morals is proved by the fact that Goldoni's satire put an

end to the state-protected gambling that was the bane of Venice in that day as it is at Monaco in ours. The institution of the *cavalere servente*, or *Cicisbeo*, the secondary unlegalised husband or protected lover, which had been the curse of Italian family life for many generations, as a sort of consolation for the *mariage de convenance*, also slunk away under the keen shafts of Goldoni's ridicule; just as chivalry itself, from which it was derived, perished from romance at the castigation of Cervantes. "Il Cavalarie e la Dama," "The Lord and the Lady," was the title of the death-dealing comedy. He wrote that he had regarded for a long time with amazement these singular creatures, these martyrs of gallantry, slaves of the fair sex. This play, which depicted them to the life, was represented fifteen consecutive evenings. Goldoni, as may be suspected, wrote his plays with the greatest possible facility. Thus, when it was almost time for the last of them to be put on the stage, the carnival was nearing its finale. He had not even decided on a subject. One day, in Saint Mark's, he saw an old Armenian, a seller of dried fruits, ragged and derided. He rushed home and wrote, "I

Pettegolezzi," "Billingsgate Gossips," a light comedy, which had the most extraordinary success.

But in the midst of the radiant happiness that surrounded him at this period arose discordant notes. Medebac, whose pockets he had filled, was close and grasping. He argued that Goldoni had fame, applause, immortality, that ought to suffice him; what more could he want? He would add to his fame and his own wealth by publishing the comedies. A quarrel ensued. In 1752 Goldoni parted company with Medebac and joined the troupe of a Venetian named Vendramin, who owned the theatre San Luca, and for him he wrote "La Locandiera," which is justly regarded as one of his best comedies, with its charming type in the far-sighted Mirandolina. He had already written upward of ninety pieces for the stage and now he took hold with fresh zeal to compose for his new patron. For him he laboured ten years.

One of the first plays that he wrote for San Luca was "L'Avaro Geloso," in which, as in Plautus' "Aulularia," and Molière's "L'Avare," the type illustrated is the miser; but Goldoni did not copy his predecessors, he drew from life; but

more than in the majority of his comedies the success depended on the actor.

During these ten years his fecundity was amazing. No less than sixty came in quick succession. Merely to mention his masterpieces, much more to analyse them, would be out of the question within reasonable limits. Moreover, they scarcely need analysis. Goldoni's plays are usually so simple in construction that the plot is of little consequence: the display of contrasted character, the cleverness of the dialogue give them their charm. The story of his successes and failures, of his encounters with rivals, especially with the Count Gozzi, is all told with unfailing humour in his Memoirs.

In 1760 came his great play *I Rusteghi*, in which with wonderful skill he takes four similar characters — compared to the same person photographed in four different poses — to prove, as he said — that human characters are inexhaustible. The three wives make a sufficient contrast and the action is full of life and the dialogue of humour.

In Venice Goldoni's chief enemy and rival was Count Gozzi, who also published an autobiography which has been translated by J. A.

Symonds. Gozzi's family having been ruined, he became an adventurer and at last drifted back to Venice where he produced ridiculously stilted fantastic dramas and *fiabe* for the company of Sacchi. Such plays as "La Donna Serpente," "Il Mostro Turchino," "L' Augellin," "Bel Verde" and "Il Re dei Genii" pleased the public and Goldoni was consequently neglected. The petty quarrels that agitated Venice at that time are in themselves comedies but they were not conducive to happiness among those that took part in them. For instance, Gozzi was called by some of his adversaries Bad Count, *mal cavaliere*, unworthy impostor, liar, false philosopher: and he retorted by a shower-bath of insults in which he used such epithets as proud, impudent, of viperous humour, vindictive, blind, haughty, impostor, mad, petulant, timid, vile, pedant, dwarf-pedant and dozens of others. This strange, selfish, misanthropic free thinker was a sturdy fighter. He died in 1806 at the age of eighty-six.

The history of Venice in the eighteenth century would not be complete without notice of Carlo Gozzi.

In 1761 Goldoni was invited to Paris for two years. One of his *maschere*, "Harlequin's Son

Lost and Found," had been performed there and with great success. He made an effort to secure a promised living in Venice. It was not granted to him and so he left never to return. Among his last works written for Italian audiences was "Sior Todero Brontolon," which is regarded as only second to the "Rusteghi." It also satirises the miser who is a tyrant in his own family. His farewell comedy was entitled "Una delle Ultime Sere di Carnevale," "The Last Carnival Evening," in which he himself as Anzoleto assures his auditors that he shall ever remember his *adoratissima patria*, his beloved friends. "I confess and swear on my honour," says the leading character, "that I depart with anguished heart [*col cuor strazzo*], that no allurement, no good fortune whatever shall compensate me for the sorrow [*il despiaser*] of being far from those that wish me well."

Goldoni, with his wife and nephew, left Venice in April, 1762 — not the preceding year as he says in his Memoirs — and did not reach Paris until near the end of August. Paris enchanted him but he did not find all easy sailing. There, as in Italy, he was obliged to conquer the prejudices and instruct the ignorance of the

Italian actors. The first two years of his engagement produced twenty-four works, eight of which kept the stage: in the others, and to a certain extent in all, there was a certain retrogression, since he had aimed rather at winning the applause of ignorance than of satisfying himself.

His Memoirs, and especially his letters, give interesting details of his life and experiences in Paris. Instead of staying there two years and then going to Portugal, as he had planned, he stayed on for thirty years. The court made him independent of the Italian company; he was appointed Italian master to the Royal children. After he had been in Paris nine years he wrote his first French comedy, "Le Bourru Bienfaisant," "The Kind Churl," which was played in November, 1771, for twelve evenings. It has been translated into English. He wrote one other in French, "L'Avare Fastueux," which, though full of comic situations, by a mere accident failed to please.

With characteristic obliviousness of political events he was serene even when the volcano of the French Revolution was threatening to pour forth its destruction. The report was carried to Italy in 1792 that Goldoni had been guillo-

tined. He escaped but he was reduced to poverty His last letter, written four months and a few days before his death, declared that he had *un stomaco valoroso ed un cuore sensibile.*

He died February 6, 1793. On the day following the poet Chénier introduced into the National Convention a bill to continue Goldoni's salary. When it was learned that it was too late, the Convention granted his widow a pension of 1,200 francs. Whether the pension was paid may well be doubted.

Goldoni must have been a most entertaining and fascinating person. Everything testifies to his sunny, gay and amusing character. Even his peculiarities were piquant and original. Unfortunately for foreign readers some of his best comedies were written in the Venetian dialect which he loved and which he was engaged in his later days in disposing into a dictionary. It may be interesting to get a glimpse of some of his principles of composition. I will therefore translate a few of his epigrammatic sayings:

A writer who writes for the theatre writes for the people.

Whatever is represented on the stage ought always to be a copy of what happens in the world.

One must prefer a disagreeable truth to a delicious imagination.

When I set out to write a comedy I do not avail myself of the stories or the works of others ; I search in Nature and according as it is natural and life-like in the type so is it in the character.

The simple and natural far more than the marvellous control the heart of man.

Spectacular comedies are not true comedies, and if I have written such it was through complacency.

On the stage the moral that comes from the most commonly approved practices should prevail.

Comedy being an image of common life, its end and aim ought to be to display on the stage the faults of private individuals in order to cure the faults of the public.

My whole aim has not been to satirize and punish vice but my principal object [*principalissimo scopo*] has ever been to keep virtue in sight, to reward it, to fill the spectators with love of it and to give it greater success when confronted with vices and their worst causes.

The unity of the action is an indispensable precept to be observed in dramas when the argument concerns one principal person. But when the collective title concerns more persons unity itself is found in the multiplicity of actions. It is not true that the characters ought to be indispensable according as the comedy could not be carried on without them. All that is required is that they work together well and in harmony, increasing the beauty and the intrigue.

Double entendres are tolerable in comedies when it can be believed that the least malicious can interpret them in a good sense ; but God defend me from scandalising the innocent. I have worked and ever shall work in the sweat of

my face for this end : to free our stage from obscenity and vice [*malizia*] and if ever the comic spirit seduces me I am glad to be corrected.

Characters are not infinite in kind but in species ; while every virtue, every vice, varies according to circumstances.

VIII

ALFIERI AND TRAGEDY

RANIERI DE' CASALBIGI, in a long letter criticising Alfieri's first four printed tragedies, begins with the statement that the Italians had been hitherto shamefully poor in tragedy, *vergognasamente poveri nella tragedia*, and after making some very reasonable criticisms on the unnaturalness of the complications, the absurdity or puerility of the conceptions, the languidness of the verse, the inharmoniousness of the poetry of the Tragic Muse of Italy, he proceeds to suggest the reasons why there was such a dearth of masterpieces.

This letter was written more than a century ago, and from his standpoint is quite satisfactory: but we now know far more thoroughly and understand better the social and political conditions of the past two centuries. I need only hint at the reasons: the spread of humanism which made men contented with imitation of the models left by Seneca; the lack of theatres and consequently of adequate professional

actors; the division of Italy into a dozen little independent provinces, with no central capital as heart or head — no literary language universally understood; the jealousy of church and princes, many of whom were themselves engaged in tragedies of real life and would therefore not relish seeing their counterpart represented on the stage.

De' Casalbigi looked forward to the time when there should be a continuous and permanent theatre in which the best actors should be engaged at liberal salaries, where women freed from the prejudices that attached to the profession, should have equal chances, and where original or translated dramas, comic and tragic, should be constantly on the stage, giving to the young poet practical lessons in the management of the passions and of character, in the treatment of plot and all the details so indispensable to an art so exacting.

We have seen how the influence of Plautus and Terence conditioned the Italian comedy down to the time when Goldoni brought about a revolution and replaced the comedy of masks by something approaching the comedy of character. In tragedy the Latin influence was still more stilted and unfortunate: the only Latin model of consequence was the semi-

mythical Seneca, whose dramas were rhetorical exercises meant to be declaimed and not acted. The revival of the study of Greek might have given a better stimulus but the idea generally prevalent was that Seneca was superior to any of the great Athenian triumvirate.

The one thing that occupied the Italian* dramatists from Trissino whose "Sofonisba" is generally regarded as the first tragedy, down to Goldoni, was the observance of the unities.

The three unities are like the three Gray Sisters: two are mortal, one is immortal. The unity of action is in its broadest signification absolutely essential: episodes however beautiful and effective only detract from the onflowing of the current that brings the fatal climax. And undoubtedly unity of time and space also greatly concentrate the interest when it can be arranged naturally. But the power of the imagination is not regarded, and the efforts of the classic dramatists to accomplish impossibilities brought about most ridiculous absurdities.

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* L'Anguillara partially translated the "Oidipous" of Sophokles, supplying some of the scenes by passages from Seneca. This was published in 1565 in Venice. In 1574 Tasso's "Torrismondo" was brought out. This is written in the same meter as Alfieri's Tragedies and the poetry, as might be imagined, is more imaginative than dramatic.

We have seen how Goldoni was born, and educated by nature for the work of reform which he succeeded in inaugurating, his observant genius and his nomad life which brought him into contact with every variety of character, enabling him to people his stage with a vast variety of natural personages.

The destined reformer of the tragic drama had a life scarcely less nomadic, and only in its individuality less amusing. Goldoni did not hesitate to represent himself in his own comedies; we learn to know the man thoroughly from such plays as "The Honoured Adventurer" or "The Last Evening." Especially in his "Memoirs" his enthusiasm, his frankness, his gaiety, his shallowness, his lack of knowledge, his *bonhomie*, are all amply manifest. But in Alfieri's nineteen tragedies and six comedies, and even in his Autobiography (which like Goldoni's has been published with an introduction by Mr. Howells), can not be seen a trace of the fiery, moody, ill-disciplined, restless, proud nature of Count Vittorio Alfieri. He strips himself of all his characteristics: his plays are so classic in form as to be lacking in every poetic grace; he tells the extraordinary story of his life as if

he were a critical outsider who felt no interest in the matter except as it was not a bad idea to have a correct impression of his life.

"If I may perchance lack the courage or the indiscretion to tell the whole truth about myself," he says, "I certainly shall not be cowardly enough to tell anything that is not true."

He regarded the fact of his being the child of noble, opulent and honourable parents as trebly important in his development: he was enabled to attack the vices and foibles of the nobility without suspicion of envy, while the *utile e sana influenza* of high birth kept him from ever contaminating the nobility of the art which he professed; freedom from sordid cares left him *libero e puro* — independent and untempted to serve anything but the truth; while the uprightness, purity and generosity of his mother and stepfather made him glad that he also was born a noble.

His father was Count Antonio Alfieri: his mother Monica Maillard de Tournon, the widow of the Marchese di Cacherano. Vittorio was born on the 17th of January, 1749, at Asti in Piedmont; less than a year afterward his father died at the age of sixty. His mother

being still a young woman took for her third husband the Cavaliere Giacinto Alfieri di Maghano. This union proved to be *beatissima ed esemplare.* He especially eulogises his *ottima madre stimabilissima*, her *ardentissima eroica pietà*, her absolute consecration to the relief of the destitute, her strong and sublime character.

His early years he calls *stupida vegetazione* and among his earliest remembrances was his grief at being deprived of his only sister Giulia, who was put into the Convent at Asti where he could see her only once a week. He himself was confided to a good priest named Don Ivaldi whom he calls *ignorantuccio*: but it was not then considered necessary for a *Signore* to be as learned as a *Dottore.*

At the Chiesa del Carmine next his stepfather's house he was in the habit of attending various ceremonials and the sight of the Carmelite novices in their white surplices and with their boyish faces which seemed to remind him of his sister, filled his tender, impressionable heart with a vague longing and melancholy. He did not then know that it was love thus early manifesting itself. Byron was equally

precocious in this flowering of the heart: but he had at least a definite object in his pretty cousin while Alfieri's passion was exhaled in distant contemplation of what seemed to him angels with their serene faces, their censers and candles, their genuflections and their penetrating songs.

He neglected alike his studies and his friends, and under the burden of a morbid melancholy, tried to commit suicide, by devouring handfuls of weeds, hoping that among them might be that called hemlock. He only succeeded in making himself sick at the stomach and as his red and swollen eyes and lack of appetite betrayed him, he was finally compelled to confess the truth, whereupon his mother with strange lack of wisdom made his malady worse by confining him to his chamber for several days. A still more absurd attempt to regulate his moodiness was made when he was sent to mass with a netted nightcap on. Not heeding his shrieks and screams, his tutor, the priest, dragged him along by the arm, while a servant pushed him from behind and thus he was conducted to the distant church of San Martino and brought home again with death in his heart as he says,

and feeling himself forever dishonoured. His agony resulted in an illness and the nightcap punishment was never tried again.

Even more unwise was his preparation for his first spiritual confession. The good priest Don Ivaldi had this duty in charge and he suggested to the boy every imaginable sin, most of which he did not even know by name. And when he went to Padre Angelo, his mother's confessor he was absolved on condition that he should kneel down at his mother's feet at the dinner-table and in presence of all ask her pardon for all his past failings. This had been arranged in concert with his mother and one may imagine the torment that it caused his sensitive nature when at dinner-time his mother looked sternly at him and demanded if he had done his whole duty and if he had a right to sit down with the rest. He was then less than eight years old.

Alfieri's autobiography is divided into four epochs. The second entitled "Adolescenza" has a significant subtitle: — "Embraces eight years of uneducation" — *abbraccia otto anni d'ineducazione.* A childhood so ill-regulated was followed by a training not less injudicious. Its dangers may be imagined when we

read that at nine years and a half of age he was as it were *dumped* into the Academy of Turin and left to his own guidance; his only safeguard being a domestic named Andrea or Alessandrino who was so far superior to his class that he knew how to read and write. Of the school itself he says "no moral maxim was ever given, no vital teaching, and who would have given it when the teachers themselves knew the world neither by theory nor by practice?"

His picture of the school is pathetic. While the boys had no supervision they were confronted constantly by the spectacle of the older students and the king's pages, twenty or twenty-five of them, indulging in every kind of dissipation, being subject to no kind of restraint provided they were in by midnight. He expresses his disgust vigorously when he compares himself to an ass among asses kept by an ass, *asino fra asini e sotto un asino.*

In spite of all these drawbacks he made some advancement or at least was promoted at the end of the first year to the Umanità, where for still another year his habits he declares were *innocenti e purissimi:* his only dissipation being the perusal of four volumes of Ariosto which he

acquired volume by volume by exchanging his half of the chicken allowed each student every Sunday. Lack of food and sleep stunted his growth and debilitated his health, so that he compared himself to a thin pale wax candle—*candelotto di cero sottilissimo e pallidissimo*, and he broke out with sores so disgusting that his companions called him *Carogna* and *Fradicia*: rotten, carrion. His copy of Ariosto having been discovered it was taken away by the subprior but the loss was not so serious to him because he could not understand it. The following year he managed to abstract the volumes from the subprior's library while the worthy father was watching a game of *pallone* from his window: this was all that he knew of Italian literature except a few of Metastasio's opera librettos and some of Goldoni's comedies.

"The genius for things dramatic, the germ of which was possibly implanted in me, was likely soon to be hidden or extinguished for lack of sustenance, of encouragement, and everything else. And in very fact my ignorance and that of those who were educating me and the negligence of all in everything could not have been more complete."

One bright spot in his life was the transfer of his sister to a convent in Turin where he was enabled to see her two or three times a week. His uncle who had been absent from the city as governor of Cuneo, discovered his wretched condition and brought about some alleviation; and another relative, his father's cousin — *semi-zio* — Count Benedetto Alfieri, first architect to the king, began to take some notice of him though the fact that he spoke pure Tuscan — *suo benedetto parlar Toscano* — which was contraband in that amphibious city — was a drawback to their intercourse. After he had, like a parrot, mastered the pedantic and insipid philosophy and the even more useless mathematics of the Academy and had been passed on to the University he was treated a little more like a human being: one night he was allowed to stay at the house of his relative, the architect, and it was an occasion to be marked with a white stone, for he was taken to the theatre of Carignano where he saw an opera bouffe, "Il Mercato di Malmantile," sung by the best comic singers of Italy.

The verve and variety of that divine music made a very deep impression on him — to use

his own phrase, "left a furrow of harmony in his ears and in his imagination"; so that for a week he was immersed in an extraordinary but not unpleasing melancholy which disgusted him more than ever with his ordinary pursuits, and filled his mind with a most singular ebullition of ideas which would have expressed itself in verse if he had only known how. From that time forth he always found music — and especially the voices of women — the most powerful and indomitable stimulant of his mind, heart and intellect: nothing, he says, ever caused such varied and terrible effects. And he adds: "almost all of my tragedies have been conceived either while hearing music or shortly after."

In August 1762, his uncle Pellegrino allowed him to visit him in Cuneo and the journey in the open air through the beautiful plains of Piedmont was very beneficial to his health but the slow rate of travel — *quella ignobile e gelida tardezza del pazzo d'asino* — mortified him so that he shut his eyes so as not to see; nor till his dying day could he decide whether his passion for swift motion was the product of a generous and lofty spirit or of one light and vainglorious.

At Cuneo he wrote his first sonnet, which he

confesses was a hodgepodge made up of Metastasio and Ariosto but without correctness of rhyme or meter for though he had been taught Latin hexameters and pentameters, he knew nothing about the rules of Italian verse. It was in homage of a lady whom his uncle was courting. The lady praised it and the lad felt that he was a poet, but his uncle, a severe military martinet, cared nothing about the nine Muses and made all manner of sport of what he calls his *sonnettaccio primogenito*, wretched little first born sonnet, and so dried up his poetic vein that he did not again desire to versify till he was five and twenty. During the year 1763 —he being then fourteen — his afternoons were devoted to the lessons in ethics, and his mornings to physics under the famous Padre Beccaria. He always regretted that his wretched preparation in mathematics prevented him from appreciating the lectures on electricity, so rich in fascinating discoveries. This year his uncle was made Viceroy of Sardinia and on his departure entrusted Alfieri's property to a gentleman who was wise enough to give him a small monthly allowance. His uncle had always refused to do so.

Shortly after, the troublesome eruptive dis-

ease of his scalp returned, and he was obliged to sacrifice his long red hair and wear a wig. The wig was a source of immense amusement to Alfieri's companions, but he quickly discovered that the way to avoid such persecution was to participate in making a football of the wig: you must always seem to give spontaneously what you can not prevent being taken from you!

He had lessons in geography and enjoyed them, especially as his tutor taught him in French and lent him many French books — "Gil Blas"— and such novels as "Les Mémoires d'un Homme de Qualité" which he read through at least ten times. He had piano lessons but in spite of a quick ear and a natural gift, he made little progress. He attributed this to the lessons coming immediately after dinner when his mind was unfitted for any exercise. For fencing he was quite too feeble and he detested dancing, largely because the dancing-master was a Frenchman newly arrived from Paris with a politely impertinent air and an eternal caricature in his actions and words. He attributed to this puppet his life-long dislike of the French and their affairs which, says he, "are nothing but a perpetual minuet badly danced!"

He had other reasons for his dislike, however, and one was that when a very small boy he had seen the Duchess of Parma and her French suite, all painted and powdered. Another still more deeply seated was that the French had once been masters of his native town and had been captured six or seven thousand strong and were therefore in his idea cowards.

His uncle, six months after going to Sardinia, died, leaving his property to him, and by the laws of Piedmont he was his own master, having now reached the age of fourteen. His *curatore* or guardian had authority only to keep him from alienating his real estate.

He was at the same time delivered from the tyranny of his valet Andrea who when drunk beat him, and when sober locked him in his room for hours at a time. In spite of this atrocious treatment Alfieri was exceedingly fond of the fellow and for weeks after his dismissal went to visit him and from time to time gave him all the pocket money he had.

The prior of the Academy knowing how anxious he was to enter the riding-school, gave him permission, providing he would obtain from the University the first grade of the docto-

rate called *il Magistero*. He went through a regular system of cramming and in less than a month he had passed the necessary examination: and soon was possessor of a horse. To the exercise of horsemanship which he calls *piacevole e nobilissimo*, he considered that he owed all the health and robustness to which he rapidly attained and which made a new man of him.

Under his new sense of freedom he declares it was incredible how his crest was elevated. He informed the prior and his *curatore* that the study of the law bored him to death and was a waste of time. So he was transferred to the first apartment where he says he had a splendid table regally served, much dissipation, very little study, much sleeping, riding horseback every day and almost absolute liberty of action.

Most of his companions were foreigners and as he conversed with them in French or Latin and spent no small part of his time reading French romances, he actually forgot what he calls *quel poco di triste Toscano* he had managed to pick up during three years of burlesque studies of the humanities and asinine rhetorical branches.

How ill-directed his efforts were may be judged from the fact that he read the thirty-six volumes of Fleury's "Histoire Ecclesiastique" and made abstracts of eighteen volumes of it. The sole value of this enormous labour was that he was wakened to a distrust of priests and their doings — *le loro cose*. Remember he was only a boy of less than fifteen!

His servitor was required to go with him wherever he went but though a good natured fellow and easily bribed, Alfieri objected to even this semblance of restriction, as he was the only one in the first apartment burdened with such a monitor. So he began to go out alone without him. But when he was detected several times after admonition, he was put under house arrest and finally kept in his room more than three months. The coldness and self restraint of his autobiography may be seen in the few lines which he devotes to this barbarous treatment.

I persisted in my unwillingness to ask to be released: and thus in my fury and my obstinacy I believe that I would have rotted but never have yielded. I used to sleep almost all day, then toward night get up and, dragging a mattress close to the grate, stretch myself on the floor and, as I was unwilling to receive the ordinary dinner of the Academy which they brought to my room, I used to cook

polenta and such things by the fire. My hair was not combed, nor did I put on my clothes and I grew to be like a savage. I was forbidden to leave my room but my outside friends, the faithful companions of our heroic escapades, were allowed to visit me. But I would lie deaf and dumb and like an inanimate corpse, making no reply to anything that was said to me. And thus I continued whole hours with my eyes, full of unshed tears, fastened on the ground.

Not a comment! Not a complaint! Not a flourish! Not an extra word!

He goes on to tell how the marriage of his sister to Count Giacinto di Cumiana released him from this life of a truly brute beast — *questa vita di vero bruto bestia*. He was put on an equality with the other young men and his guardian was compelled to give him a larger allowance. He spent it on horses, acquiring eight in a single year, and in magnificent clothing, out of rivalry with some young Englishmen who were in the University. He tells how after dining with his comrades in the Academy he would change his splendid clothes for much simpler ones so as not to hurt the feelings of his poorer friends in the city, and this he did, he says, out of a natural and invincible repugnance to seeming to outshine anyone whom he

knew or felt to be inferior to him in physical powers, talent, generosity, disposition or purse. He also had an elegant carriage built for him, though he confessed that it was a most useless absurdity for *un ragazzaccio* of sixteen in a city so microscopic as Turin, but he never rode out in it for the same laudable reasons but always went *a sante gambe* — which may mean on horseback or on foot.

He ends the chapter in which he gives these details with the observation that amid the many perversities of a tumultuous, idle, untrained and ill-regulated life, he could discern in himself a natural inclination toward justice, equality and generosity of spirit. A ten days' trip to Genoa where he first saw the sea had a great effect on his imagination. And again he was tempted to write verses, but how could he when for almost two years he had scarcely opened a book except some of Voltaire's prose works and a few French novels? Neither did his first real passion for the sister-in-law of two of his comrades elicit a single sonnet though he felt all the symptoms "so learnedly and pathetically imaged by our divine master of that divine passion, il Petrarca."

His journey to Genoa awoke in him an immense desire to travel.

After a farcical service in the army, he succeeded in extorting from his guardian and from the jealous king permission to be gone for a year. He left Turin in October 1766.

And here begins the third epoch of his life, comprising eight years of travels and *dissolutezze*.

In the Ambrosian Library at Milan an autograph MS. of Petrarca was shown him, but it did not interest him! His sole idea of travel was to fly from place to place with all conceivable swiftness, not stopping for either paintings or sculpture or even architecture. At Florence, instead of making the most of his opportunities to practise the divine language, he took lessons in English. A day in Lucca seemed to him a century.

Obtaining permission to extend his travels, he went to Paris, being principally attracted by the hope of enjoying the theatre. But neither at this time nor when he had seen in Turin a company of French actors, nor for some years later, had the thought ever arisen in his mind that he might some day write theatrical compositions. And he says that though he knew the principal

French comedies and tragedies, and always listened with attention, still it was without the slightest thought or impulse toward creation. And at this time comedy pleased him more than tragedy though he was more inclined to tears than to mirth. He explains his indifference to French tragedy by the fact that whole scenes and even acts were devoted to dialogues between secondary characters, thus lengthening the action and dissipating the effect. He was also disagreeably impressed by the monotony and sing-song of the French verse and the unpleasing nasal tones.

He spent some time in Marseilles where he got great enjoyment from sea-bathing, going quite a distance from the port and sitting with his back against a high rock, so that he had only the vast immensities of sea and sky before him, while his soul was rapt within him at sight of the setting sun, and he would fain have composed many poems had he only known how to write in rhyme or in prose in any language.

Yet when he became tired of Marseilles, he says he went more like a fugitive than a traveller, night and day, pausing not at Aix with its lovely smiling landscape, nor at Avignon where was

Laura's tomb, nor at Vaucluse so long the home of our divine Petrarca; only at Lyons was he compelled by sheer weariness to pause and rest. From there he flew to Paris as an arrow is sent from a bow. Paris then was very different from the clean, magnificent city of to-day. And the contrast between the smiling landscapes of Provence and the wretched suburb of Saint Marcel, the foul-smelling, muddy* Faubourg Saint Germain, the tasteless architecture of the houses, the ridiculous pretensions of the palaces, the Gothic taste displayed in the churches, and the vandal-like structure of the theatres, and the *pessimamente architettate facce impiastrate* of the women, all seen under the gloom of a misty sky, entirely disenchanted him; though he liked the beautiful gardens and the thronged boulevards and the handsome coaches and the splendid façade of the Louvre and the innumerable shows.

But the general impression of disgust with Paris, where for two weeks he did not once see the sun, never faded from his mind: it was just as vivid twenty-three years later. But he was delighted with London and England and would

* It seems strange to think of the Royal Coach being *embourbée* —stuck in the mud—between Versailles and Paris.

gladly have lived there all his days; the beauty of the country, the unaffected customs, the fair and modest women and girls and the just government and liberty engendered therefrom made him almost forget the wretched climate, the melancholy ever present and the ruinous cost of living there.

In Holland he had his first serious love-affair and while he was languishing in the net, the Portuguese Minister to The Hague, a man of great talent and originality, of considerable culture, warm-hearted and high-spirited quite won his sympathy and confidence. He tells how he used to speak *dell' amata all' amico e dell' amico all' amata.* This worthy friend gave him excellent counsel, which made him ashamed of his stupid lazy life, never opening a book, of his ignorance and especially his neglect of the Italian poets and philosophers.

Among other writers he mentioned Machiavelli whom Alfieri knew only by name and, as it were, obscured by prejudices. He for the first time noticed what often afterwards occurred to his observation that only while he was deeply in love did he feel a passion for study and an impetus and effervescence of creative

ideas. The husband of the fair Dutch dame kept flying about the country: he was not at all jealous and after them flew poor Alfieri like the tail of a kite.

When the time came, however, for the Baroness to say a final adieu to her fiery lover, she left him a little note and the young man was so desperate that he tried to commit suicide by bleeding to death. He hired a doctor to bleed him and when the doctor was gone he tore off the bandage but his faithful servant discovered his condition and brought him to his senses.

Soon after this he returned to Italy travelling with his usual rapidity, seeing nothing of Nancy, Strasbourg, Basle, or Geneva except their walls; nor speaking a word during the twenty days of the journey, while Elia humouring his whim, used signs as if he had been deaf and dumb. While wearing off the melancholy effects of this ridiculous love affair he varied his solitude by reading Rousseau, Montesquieu, Voltaire and other French works. Plutarch also came into his hands and the stories of the great men of the past kindled in his mind the love for glory and virtue and what he calls the *soddisfacentissima arte del rendere bene per male*—the all satisfying

art of rendering good for evil. This was to him the book of books and he tells how when he came across certain passages he would spring to his feet in the keenest agitation, quite beside himself, while tears of grief and rage poured down his cheeks at the thought that he had been born in Piedmont, at a time and under a king when there was no chance for either action or speech.

He gives a most naive and amusing account of a plan to marry him to a very beautiful black-eyed young lady with large possessions and a title; but his reputation for eccentricity and lack of good manners caused the negotiations to fall through. His good fortune, he says, saved him from this marriage to which he was inclined. The girl, he adds, acted most wisely for her well-being, for she spent a happy life in the home of the young gentleman whom she married and the result was that Alfieri was reserved for the service of the Muses.

The plans for his diplomatic career, as well as the plans matrimonial, all went up in smoke. He was free to travel and so with an increased allowance of spending money — 2,500 zechins equal to about $6,000 a year — he started off through Germany, Hungary, Denmark and

Sweden. Montaigne was now his daily companion, but the Latin quotations were an almost insuperable obstacle and the occasional passages from the early Italian poets were beyond his comprehension. "Such," says he, "was the primitive ignorance in me and my lack of practice in that divine language which every day I was more and more losing the use of."

At Vienna where he might have met Metastasio he declined the introduction, feeling that the society which met at his house was only *una brigata di pedanti*. Besides he had actually seen the poet on his knees kissing Maria Teresa's hand with a face expressive of such servile delight and obsequiousness that in his newly acquired Plutarchian spirit of democracy he felt that he could never shake hands with a Muse sold to a despot so warmly abhorred.

At Berlin the military spirit also disgusted him, but he was presented to Frederick the Great. At seeing him he confessed to no feeling either of wonder or of respect, but rather of indignation and fury. He even refused to wear the Court uniform, and when the King's minister asked him his reason he replied that it seemed to him there were plenty of them. The King,

he says, uttered the usual meaningless formalities. "I studied him deeply, respectfully looking into his face and I thanked heaven that I was not born his slave."

At Copenhagen, which especially delighted him because it was not Prussia or Berlin, he had a chance to practise, or at least to hear, pure Tuscan spoken by the Neapolitan minister to Denmark. Under this influence he even read the Dialogues of Aretino, the originality, variety and correctness of which delighted him.

Sweden gave him a practical acquaintance with Ossian before he had ever read any of that humbugging bard's rhapsodies. The sudden appearance of spring in that far northern climate again made him feel like tuning his harp but alas! he knew not how to play.

He had a great desire to visit Russia, having heard his Russian schoolmates at the Academy boast of their land. After a most exciting and dangerous voyage from Stockholm to Åbo and from Åbo to Petersburg, he was once more bitterly disappointed. The great barrack-like palaces of that Asiatic encampment, as he called it, seemed laughable. He refused to be presented to *la Clitenestra filosofessa*, the Semiramis

of the North, Catherine the Second, and he accounts for his "uselessly barbarian behaviour" by attributing it to his inflexible intolerance, his utmost hatred of tyranny in the abstract, and more especially because she was guilty of having poisoned her husband.

Alfieri's second visit to London, in 1771, was rendered notable by a love affair with a viscountess. The whole story reads like one of Cardinal Bibbiena's comedies nor do I know anything more ludicrous in the modern system of duelling as practised by French deputies and novelists than Alfieri's sword battle with the injured husband. Driven out of his senses by his passion for the fair lady he spent the time away from her presence in galloping about on a very fiery and impetuous steed. In trying to clear a gate the horse fell with him, breaking his collar-bone and dislocating his shoulder. It was some time before he began to feel the pain. The surgeon set the bones and ordered him to stay in bed, but not he. He was bound to keep an appointment with her ladyship who was staying at a villa about sixteen miles from London.

When he got back after all manner of adventures his bandages were out of place and his

shoulder in a terrible state. The surgeon pulled him together again, but the following evening he insisted on going to the opera. While apparently listening to the music, his face like marble, betraying no emotion while *mille tempeste terribili* were agitating his heart, he was called out and there stood the viscount. The conversation was short and to the point — to the point of the sword. They adjourned to Green Park and had their duel, Alfieri apparently trying to provoke his adversary to kill him and the Lord L—— as obstinately refusing to take any such advantage from a man who had his arm in a sling. They fought for ten minutes, and then Alfieri received a slight scratch in his arm, and the militant husband declared his honour was satisfied. Alfieri tied up his little wound with his teeth, and finding it not painful returned to the box where he had been sitting and heard the rest of the opera.

After it was over he went to the house of a lady who knew Lady L——. There to his amazement he found *la stessa stessissima donna mia* — her ladyship herselfmost. He soon found that she was a most contemptible character, and only that discovery prevented him from

doing exactly what Lord Byron a generation later proposed to do with the Countess Guiccioli — namely to fly to America — "the world forgetting by the world forgot." There is a very curious analogy between Lord Byron's career and Alfieri's: the neglected childhood, the erratic youth, the early susceptibility, the long journeys, the numberless intrigues and finally the irregular relationship which lasted through the last part of their lives.

The finale of Alfieri's adventure was just as ridiculous as any other part of it, but as Lord L—— did not see fit to sue him for alienating his wife's affections, the impetuous poet left England and soon found himself in Paris again, where out of mere whim he refused to meet Rousseau, though he felt the highest esteem for his pure and lofty character and his sublime and independent conduct.

He atoned for this by making the acquaintance of seven or eight of the first men of Italy and of the world: Dante, Petrarca, Ariosto, Tasso, Boccaccio and Machiavelli. In other words, he bought 36 volumes of prose and poetry and he says that these illustrious masters henceforth accompanied him wherever he went. He

had left all his English horses in England, selling all but one; now he went to Spain and as usual paid no attention to the lovely landscapes on the way. But to atone he bought two Spanish horses of noble pedigree, one a golden chestnut Andalusian — *un stupendo animale, castagno d'oro.* And in Barcelona he actually had the enterprise to read "Don Quixote" with the aid of a grammar and dictionary.

He crossed the wide desert plains of Arragon rather slowly with his beautiful horse trotting by him like a faithful dog, while behind him came all his servants and mules and other live stock. He was uncertain whether it was good fortune or ill fortune that he had no means of expressing himself at that time in verse; for he would have poured forth a perfect flood of rhymes expressive of the melancholy and moral thoughts and varying images called up by those wide solitudes and the constant motion.

At Madrid his servant Elia while arranging his hair accidentally pulled it, and Alfieri in ungovernable rage hurled the candle at him and narrowly escaped killing him on the spot. It struck his temple and caused the blood to spurt forth, and the valet being hot tempered

would in turn have killed Alfieri had not the other servants interfered to stop a quarrel which he calls *tragicomica e scandalosissima.* But that night Alfieri slept with his door open next Elia's room and offered him free chance for vengeance. Elia was too much of a hero to avail himself of it, and contented himself with keeping the two handkerchiefs which bound up his bleeding temple, and occasionally showing them to his master.

At Madrid he visited neither the Escorial nor the Aranjuez nor the King's palace, and the only acquaintance that he made was that of a poor watchmaker.

At Lisbon he was more fortunate: the Abate Tommaso di Caluso, brother of the Piedmontese Minister to Portugal, conceived a great friendship for him and with equal tact and kindness tried to turn his mind to the noble things of literature. He insisted that Alfieri was born to be a poet and that it was not too late for him, by study, to become one equal to the greatest.*

* His Andalusian steed he presented to a banker to whom he applied for a letter of credit in exchange for 300 Spanish doubloons. The banker showed his gratitude by cheating him and this confirmed him in his opinion of that class of people, who, he says, had always seemed to him one of the vilest and worst — in the social world — the more when they affect being gentlemen!

After three years' absence he reached Turin in May, 1772, and soon after took a magnificent house luxuriously furnished, and as he was unmarried and quite free, he used twice a week to assemble in his *salon* a *brigata* of young men whose sole object was amusement Among their amusements was the reading of compositions which were handed in anonymously. Alfieri himself wrote several in very mediocre French: one was a scene representing the last judgment when God demanded of various souls a short account of their actions: he introduced several well-known characters and the wit and satire caused much amusement. His natural inclination was to satire and the ridiculous, but thought and reflection caused him even then to recognise that it was the fruit of malignity and natural envy and therefore not worthy to be cultivated.

Having been caught, as he expresses it, in a third net of love, he made his first attempt at a tragedy. The lady whom he was serving was of high rank, older than he and bore a not very savoury reputation in society. Once when she fell dangerously ill and he had been sitting in perfect silence from morning to night at the foot of her bed, he beguiled the tedium by writing

a dramatic piece (whether tragedy or comedy in one, five or ten acts, he could not say) but in the form of a dialogue between Photinus, Cleopatra and a female whom he called Lachesi, forgetting that Lachesis was one of the three Fates.

In his autobiography Alfieri gives some specimens of this precious composition that the reader might judge for himself of the leanness of his poetic patrimony at that time. The verses rhyme irregularly: some lines are too long and some are too short; bad grammar and erratic punctuation are everywhere in evidence against his training, but he persevered till he got half through the first scene of the third act, when the lady saw fit to get well.

His attempts to free himself from this unworthy servitude were as abortive as his rhymed dialogue but vastly funnier. If he had only had the comic vein of Goldoni! He tells in the story which he sent to a friend how he once started off to be gone a year but was back within eighteen days, unable to endure separation; how, when once more he resolved to break the yoke, he cropped his long red hair—*lunga e ricca treccia dei miei rosissimi capelli*—(for only peasants

and sailors wore their hair short) and stayed in the house for five or six days, seeing his Calypso going in and out of her house, which faced his and even hearing her voice; and how like another Ulysses fearing lest her siren-song should be too much for him he obliged Elia to tie him into his chair lest he should escape and become a slave again. The cord was concealed under a large cloak, but his hands were left free for writing or reading and no one seeing him would suspect that he was fastened!

Thus struggling with his fate, he read, but often he understood not a word of what he had been reading and he wrote his first sonnet, which runs as follows:

At last I have won the day, unless I am deceived, the day I have won; quenched is the flame which burnt voraciously this poor heart of mine caught by unworthy snares: whose motions blind Love controlled.

Before I loved thee, O Lady, I knew well, that such a fire (of passion) was wrong and a thousand times I have avoided it and conquered love a thousand times so that it was not alive nor yet extinct.

The long pain and the grievous tears, the keen torments and the cruel bitter doubt ('whereby the life of lovers is entwined') I behold with eyes not abstinent of weeping [*avari di pianto*]. Fool, what do I say? Virtue, Courage among so many cares, it is alone whose thoughts are dear.

This *piccolo saggio* he showed to the learned Padre Paciandi who replied in a gracious letter:

> Messer Francesco was kindled with love for Monna Laura and thus unpassioned himself [*si disinnamoro*] and sang his repentance. Then again he loved his Diva and ended his days loving her not indeed philosophically but as all other men have been wont to do. You, *mio gentilissimo Signor Conte*, have taken up poetising: You will only imitate that father of Italian rhymsters in this amorous occupation. If your escape from its chains has been by force of courage [*virtù*] as you write, we must hope that you will not fall a victim again.
>
> However it be, the sonnet is good, sententious, *vibrato* and quite correct. I have happy auguries for you in the poetic career and for our Piedmontese Parnassus which needs just such men as you to rise above the vulgar herd.

Alfieri, however, knew well enough that the worthy abate was flattering him and that the sonnet was bad. But the *cacoethes scribendi* had seized him. He had been prudent enough to rescue his half-finished "Cleopatra" and the fit came upon him to revise that with the aid of some of his friends. He turned his house into a *semi-accademia di literati*. While this was going on he was taken with the whim of going out during the last days of the Carnival of 1775 masked as Apollo with his lyre, and at the theatre he sang some verses composed by him-

self — the whole episode most contrary to his natural disposition.

In the first of these *colascionate** he makes the statement that the man who really loves is most unfortunate; the false-hearted is only happy in love; he who doth not deceive is himself deceived; and he comes to the conclusion that *l'innamorato fa trista figura.* Everyone laughs at him and rightly too. *L'innamorato* is always a great *beccone* — he-goat. And he ends by saying that he has made his dear friends laugh, and he himself laughs at women, at his friends and at himself. There were three of these poems which he calls ridiculous and foolish, and he transcribes them to let the world see them as "an authentic monument of his lack of skill in everything that was becoming and decent."

Next he revised his "Cleopatra Tragedia" and sent the first act to the benignant Padre Paciandi to taste of it. The worthy priest thought the play showed genius, fecund imagination, and judgment in its plan, but he had to find fault with the poetry: the lines he wrote were not well

*From *Colascion*, the two-stringed Italian lute; hence a poem sung to music.

turned and failed of the *giro Italiano* — Italian swing or order. His spelling was vicious, and he suggested several text-books to read on grammar and orthography. Some of the marginal notes greatly amused Alfieri, as for instance in the 184th line where he had spoken of *il latrato del cor* — the barking of the horn — and the priest suggested that the metaphor was exceedingly canine.

He wrote the "Cleopatra" a third time and had it performed in the theatre at Turin in June 1775. He transcribes also parts of this version as a proof of his asininity. After the tragedy a short piece in prose entitled "I Poeti" written by Alfieri made satiric sport of the *Cleopatrassa*. He himself was represented as Zeusippo, but he also satirised other playwrights, whose tragedies he says were the mature fruit of learned incapacity, while his was the premature offspring of a capable ignorance.

Both of them were applauded but he soon withdrew them. His heart was filled with the keenest ambition to win some day a true theatric palm. With this absurd and feeble manner he made his first appearance before the public.

He was now twenty-seven and with resolute,

obstinate and indomitable courage, with a strange mixture of fire and of gentleness, with the intensest hatred of tyranny he began to prepare himself for his career. He had practically to begin at the very beginning and acquire his native language. Indeed his first serious attempts had been in French. He translated them into Italian, but he found they lost the little power they had.* He studied Tasso, Ariosto, then Dante. After spending six months in learning Italian he began to relearn Latin, and in three months became a fair scholar. But largely through the encouragement of his friends Paciandi and Count Tana he kept up the *feroce continua battaglia* and says "If I become a poet I ought to sign myself one by Grace of God and of Paciandi and of Tana."

Paciandi sent him the "Galateo" of Casa to study, but when he opened it and came across the first portentous conjunction—*conciossiacosache*, inasmuch as—introducing a long pompous phrase, he was so angry that he flung the book out of

* He says his tragedies were amphibious things swimming between French and Italian without being either, and again he compares them to the brown color—*che non è nero ancora, e il bianco muore*—mentioned by Dante.

the window, with a howl of rage at its pedantry. And he says he did not take up "Il Galateo" for many years until his shoulders and his neck were calloused in enduring the grammatic yoke.

His first labours were in translation, and I need not mention all the works which he put into his best Italian: they included Horace and Seneca and Racine. But when he began to compose his own tragedies he found himself too much influenced by the authors he had read, and for that reason he gave up reading Shakespeare — Shakespeare, however, not in English, but the wretched French version of the last century.

We have followed his career so far perhaps rather too closely, but it seems to me a most valuable and stimulating history: to see the evolution of this wonderful man and his strenuous endeavours to undo the errors of a false education.

The fourth epoch of his life is devoted mainly to his studies and his literary compositions. But it also includes the story of his expatriation for liberty's sake, his sacrifice of large means that he might be free to live and

write. It also includes that long and strange attachment to the Countess of Albany, first when she was the wife and then the widow of Charles Edward Stuart the Pretender, who had very much the same good influence upon his literary work that la Guiccioli had upon Byron. It is not known whether he ever married her: if so, the ceremony was absolutely private. His description of his first impression of this lady is very charming. And there are other passages that well merit consideration: but it has been my intention to give chiefly the history of his literary education and therefore I must pass over all account of his various compositions; his "Polinices and Virginia," his "Agamemnon and Orestes," "his Congiura de' Pazzi," his "Garzia" and "Timoleone." By 1782 he had fourteen tragedies completed, seven of which were the product of about ten months' work.

Nor need I speak of his further travels or of his wonderful passage of the Alps with his English horses, his escape from Paris at the time of the Revolution, or of his final days in Florence or of his wonderful acquisition of Greek, his translations of Greek and Latin

authors, his order of Homer, his six extravagant and Aristophanean Comedies, or even of his strange and haughty seclusion which he allowed to be broken neither by letters nor visits. Profound melancholy and moody irascibility marked his genius. He finished his memoirs in May 1803 and passed away on the eighth of October of the same year. He lies under a costly mausoleum design by Canova, erected in the church of Santa Croce to his memory by the Countess of Albany who lies buried with him.

Most of the subjects of his tragedies were taken from antiquity, either classic or biblical. Such tragic episodes as the assassination of Agamemnon, the murder of Abel, the madness of King Saul, or in more modern times the pathetic career of Mary Queen of Scots appealed to him. He was able to depict to the life the gloomy, morbid nature of Philip II. His tendency was to follow the classic models and to dress his few characters, as it were, in the simple draperies of the antique. He permitted few ornaments. His lines therefore seem rather bare, and this austerity is intensified by his somewhat limited vocabulary, his habit of using the same gloomy

and terrible words again and again; but when it comes to action the simplicity of the plays unites itself to power, and therefore his works have held their own upon the stage and have found worthy interpreters in such consummate actors as Salvini and Ristori.

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